

The Power of Memory

by Meiran Chang

Category: Legend of Zelda

Genre: Drama

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 1999-12-26 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-12-26 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 12:17:22

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 26,225

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Wow, something NOT Animorphs! All read! It's a long but, I think, well-written fic. Merry Xmas!

The Power of Memory

> <meta name="Generator"> The Power of Memory **_

The Power of Memory

Part One : The Girl in the Pit

_**

Prologue

A little girl sat quietly on the tiled castle floor, spinning a small top.

"You can't do this," her mother pleaded above her. "Haven't I given you all you ever wanted? Haven't I even given you this child? Oh please, don't make me leave. I won't be able to survive, Ganondorf!"

The tall, striking man in black armor was paying no mind to the beautiful woman pleading in front of him. He was putting on a helmet and was distant, preoccupied. This woman wasn't his chief concern right now.

"Natefeema," he said briskly, "You failed to produce a _male son_, which is all that I am concerned with. Daughters are useless. Therefore take the child and leave me be. I care not for you, nor for _her_." He nodded towards the little girl, playing on the floor.

The little girl looked up for a moment. She had her father's eyes. Yellow with a poisonous glare. But the little girl knew of no reason

to glare at anyone. She looked for a moment longer, then turned, and she looked up at her mother.

To the child, it was amazing how a single face could show so much detail. Her eyes had a graceful curvature to them, and they blinked underneath long-lashed curtains. Her lips were large and ready. But though beautiful, she was also relatively simple-minded. Ganondorf had simply hand-picked Natefeema from his brothel of Gerudos on basis of who looked mostâ€|shall we say, capable. Natefeema had done what she had been brought to him to do. But instead of a son, she had a daughter. Ganondorf had allowed them to live in the Valley for three years. Fickle as always, he had suddenly demanded that Natefeema and the little girl leave. Natefeema knew that she could not survive on her own.

Natefeema decided on a change in tactics and fingered the gold Triforce necklace she had pilfered from one of her servant's rooms. "Ganondorf," she said in a soft voice, "By the power of the Triforce, the sacred Triforce itself, I beseech you to let me stay."

"Go!" Ganondorf said sharply, with danger lacing his voice. He finished with the helmet and was fully equipped.

"Oh please let me stay, please King Ganondorf," Natefeema cried desperately, throwing caution to the winds, "I tried very hard â€" I'll try again â€" Oh Ganondorf, anything! O my King, don't you remember how close you came to being killed, if only because of your gender?!"

"That's it," Ganondorf muttered. He said something under his breath and then sent a jet of black light Natefeema's way. Natefeema gasped with pain and collapsed.

"That was a death blow," Ganondorf said calmly. "I told you to leave. I told you once. I told you twice. Well, there is no third time. Now leave while you have breath in your body, which you won't for very long, and take your wretched daughter with you. Guards!" he barked, and two malicious-looking Gerudos immediately strode in.

Ganondorf picked the little girl up roughly from where she was playing on the floor. She peered into his face curiously. "Eunh?" she inquired.

He shook her, just to spite Natefeema, make her feel more hurt. Then he set her down and laughed, pleased that she had not cried out. "Whatever she may be, at least she is not a weakling," he said, with a hint of certain pride creeping into his voice. Then he looked to his guards and down to the gasping woman on the floor. He looked on her as calmly and dispassionately as if he had been surveying a dying roach. "Escort her somewhere into Hyrule. Her and her offspring. And leave them there. Let them die."

The burly Gerudos nodded and wrenched the woman up. Her little girl, now recovered, picked up her spinning top and doddered after the guards who were carrying her mother away.

The Gerudo guards dropped them as quickly as possible in an unknown pit in Hyrule Field.

"Do you think we should do anything?" one of the guards asked the

other, looking pityingly at the dying mother and the little child.

The other guard hit her. "Go on, get King Ganondorf on your bad side," she egged on. "I'm sure you'd like a nice jet-blast too. Maybe" here she clapped her hands in mock delight "I can even drag you to this very same pit and you'll have company!"

"Sorry," the first guard muttered. She let her passive expression replace the worried look that had been on her face and kicked Natefeema in. They didn't have to do anything about the child, who simply followed Natefeema right in.

The guards exchanged looks.

"That girl isn't very bright, is she?" the second guard asked the first.

The first guard shrugged. "Let's just get out of here," she suggested.

"That would be a very good idea," the second guard approved, and they sped back to Gerudo Valley. It was bad to be seen outside of the Valley, seeing as the Gerudos were wanted in all seven areas of Hyrule.

But inside the musty old pit, Natefeema thought of none of these things. The pain was blocking much thought on her part. She leaned over on her side and stopped, her chest heaving with effort. The gold Triforce necklace rose and fell haphazardly.
> "Child" she called.<p>

The little girl crawled towards Natefeema and sat up, regarding her mother with those yellow eyes that matched Ganondorf's. Natefeema looked away.

"I didn't even name you," she whispered sadly to the wall. "3 years old, and I never thought to name you. I just didn't know."

Her breathing was coming slower now. Natefeema was fighting as hard to stay alive, to hush her body telling her to let go. She had to think of a name! It was the worst possible luck she could give her little girl, to leave her alone in the world without a name. A name would make sure her baby had a place in the world. Wasn't that what names were for? Or was there some other reason. Natefeema couldn't think straight.

Her head dropped back. She breathed in deeply. A rattling, labored breath. Then she exhaled. Her body relaxed and her eyes closed. She was dead.

The little girl crawled forward and touched her. Seeing that her mother didn't respond, she tried again. Her round, innocent baby's eyes filled with tears. "Mama," she whispered softly. With all the gentlest care in the world, she removed the Triforce symbol around the corpse's neck. The bewildered tears finally falling, she held the shining symbol in her small hand. But not even that, she realized, could bring her mother back.

She didn't know what her name was.

For as long as she could remember, she had lived here. Underground, in this dark, dank pit. She didn't know what she looked like. Who she was. She had no reason to ever want to know. She ventured out of her pit only for the rare visit to Hyrule Market.

She didn't like it, anyway. The Outside was too bright for her delicate eyes. That large, bright orb hanging in Hyrule Field's sky seemed useless. After all, she could see perfectly well in her pit.

—

Her pit. No one else's pit. No one ever ventured there. No one knew of it. Everyone believed that only four pits existed in all of Hyrule Field. But she knew they were wrong.

Whenever she needed to restock on food, or just wanted to play, she would visit lively Hyrule Market. People from all over Hyrule visited it, so there were always plenty of people with bulging purse-bags. She would quickly, blithely swipe a few Rupees. No one ever noticed â€" until it came time to pay for their purchases. But by then, she was gone, and they cursed empty air. The girl couldn't help but chuckle as she crept away quietly. Sometimes she would play a little game, trying to see how close she could get to the person she had stolen from. She wanted to see if they would recognize her. They never did.

Sometimes she would wonder where she came from, or why she remembered nothing except what happened yesterday. She would sit in her pit and suppose that she was the daughter of the King of Hyrule, that she was of royal blood, and that one day he himself would come to rescue her. But she just knew she was faking it. _I was probably some peasant's child, dropped in here because my mother couldn't afford me, _she'd think with a sigh. She had seen enough of that type in Hyrule Market to last a lifetime.

It was surprising that she had ever even learned language. But she was lucky, in that sense. She did not inherit her mother's intelligence (or lack thereof). She inherited her father's intelligence. And that was really quite a formidable thing to inherit.

Her stomach snarled, and she winced. She was running out of food. She would have to go out to Hyrule Market again. She never felt the slightest bit guilty about robbing people to get her food. And she was naturally gifted at stealth. She was, after all, Gerudo, though she didn't know it. And the Gerudos are the most gifted thieves in any world.

She stepped on the curious pad that would immediately waft her out of the pit and stepped into the light.

Chapter 2

That bright Orb was out again, and it was very strong today. She let out a small involuntary whimper and threw her arm across her eyes. That would help her bear it until her eyes got used to it.

The dry, raspy grass should have hurt her feet. But a little thing like dry grass couldn't affect her. She walked to the Market as calmly as if she was walking on tiled palace floors.

Occasionally she looked around, squinting under the brightness of the Orb. The land was beautiful, she acknowledged. The Orb had a strange habit of illuminating the tiniest details in the fields. A brisk wind swirled around her, blowing back her long, dark red hair.

After a small time of walking around, she had been out long enough for her eyes to adjust to the Orb's light. She cautiously removed her arm from her eyes.

As she walked in the door, she noticed that the guard gave her a strange look. "What?" she asked, coming up to him.

"You look weird," he said bluntly.

She silently debated whether she should incapacitate him now or later and decided he was just an ignorant fool. "How is this weird?"

"Look at your clothes." He snorted. "What, do you live in a pit or something?"

"Yes," she said. "But that is not your problem. I don't need to care about how I look."

"Um, yeah. Sure." The guard squinted. "Where are you from anyway? Kokiri? I've heard tales, but this is ridiculous."

"I am no Kokiri. I leave you now. You're not worth my time." She turned haughtily and strode into the Market, holding her head high. She couldn't see the spots of red on her cheek, but she could definitely feel their heat.

The Market was full of noise and chatter. There was a beggar clapping his hands on his knees. He turned to her as soon as she walked in.

"With C, sell me somethingâ€¦|With C," he begged her.

She glared and looked away, searching for someone with a full purse.

—

Aha, she thought. There we go.

She saw a young elfin boy venturing into the Shooting Gallery. But she didn't care about that. Her eyes zoomed in on the bulging bag of Rupees. He had to have at least 500 in there! A little kid like that couldn't possibly need all that money. She briefly wondered about his clothing. It had a style she couldn't identify. It certainly did not look Hylvian. And what was that little blue ball that stuck close to him?

—

Do you ever hear yourself talk? You sound foolish. Grab the bag, buy what you need and leave! her commonsense told her.

She followed him into the Gallery.

"This is a store for grown-ups, the famous shooting gallery of Hyrule Market Town!" the fat man behind the counter boomed. For a moment, she looked up. She had never quite seen anyone so ugly. She was fascinated.

The fat man patiently explained the rules, until the boy nodded. "And what's your name, sonny?" the fat man asked.

"Link. Can I please have the slingshot?" the boy asked.

"Of course, little boy!" he laughed merrily. The boy ground his teeth a little, but smiled half-heartedly in an attempt to be nice. "And you?" The fat bearded man turned to her.

"Me? What? I apologize," she said hurriedly. "I'm not here for the game. I came to, um, see."

"Alright, honey!" He reached over with one huge, pudgy hand to ruffle her head and came away with a muddy hand filled with leaves and sticks.

"Sweetheart, your hair is filthy! Now that I think of it, your clothes are ripped and old, too! Whatever happened to you?" the man asked, not unkindly. "Where's your mother?"

"No mother," she said. She looked down. "I don't have a father, either. I don't need one. I'm fine alone."

"Poor baby," the man clucked. "C'mere." He beckoned behind the counter.

She eyed him suspiciously. "Why."

"I'm not going to bite you, sweetie! The good King himself knows I wouldn't do nothing to hurt a sweet thing like you!" he cried out indignantly.

"I come, don't make such a big fuss," she said disdainfully, and crept behind the counter. She came so quietly that when she popped out again, the fat man was flustered.

"Well, fancy that!" he said, beaming all over his great red honest face. "The little missy done come up behind me and I don't even notice! You must have some right fine thievin' skills, young lady! I hope you don't use them, now!" He gestured behind him, where some swishing beads were supposed to indicate a curtain. "Why don't you step back here now, and I'll call me wife over to give you a good cleaning? I'll even give you some nice clothes, such as them little Hylian lassies wear. What do you say?"

Her answer was typical of her. "How much does it cost?"

"Aw, I'll give it to ya for free. Ya look like ya need it."

"No thank you," she said stiffly. "I've done fine without anything

like that for a long time."

"Are you sure, now?" the fat man asked. "It's freeâ€¦!"

"I'll leave it, thank you."

RING RING RING RING!

The fat man turned towards the boy, who had finished his game and was waiting with the slingshot in hand. "Well now, ain't you a good shot? You done knocked 'em all down!" He looked closely at the boy as if trying to remember something. "Now here, weren't you that kid that come here few months ago and won the bomb bag from me?"
> For the first time, the boy smiled proudly. "Yes." <p>

"Ho ho ho!" the man boomed. "And now yer back! Tell ya what, son â€" how about this here nice purple rupee for yeh, since yeh've already won me bomb bag?"

"That would be very nice," the boy agreed. He took the Rupee and put it away. "Thank you!" he chirped, his eye as bright as a robin's.

She eyed the Rupee hungrily. She needed that money. And this boy had so much, and he was using it for mere playing!

The boy, Link, walked out of the Gallery and stood, wide-eyed, in the middle of the square. It was obvious he had never been here before. He probably didn't know yet to watch for thieves.

Now was her chance.

She silently glided up. He didn't notice anything. He was still looking around, taking in the Market's sights. Then she grabbed the bag, as softly and smoothly as you please. He had felt nothing, such was the skill of her fingers. She smiled, a small, reflexive smile. But still, she felt guilty. That boy was the kind of person it was difficult to lie to and difficult to do wrong to. He had a face that was the very picture of innocence. For a moment, she felt a wistful, painful hunger unrelated to food tear at her heart. Then she pushed it aside.

She would go into the Potions shop first, just to purchase some remedies. It wasn't that she had many chances for injury, living in a pit. But a lot of times, she had fallen into the pit, not remembering that you had to step calmly into it. And she had received her fair share of bruises.

The man in the Potions shop was very nice â€" if you had money. She was almost drowned in his sugary sweet voice when she walked in.

"Young lady! Why, what pleases you here?" He took no notice of her clothes. He was eyeing the plump bag of Rupees in her hand.

"Give me a roll of bandages, an Herbs Assorted pot, and blue fire salve," she rattled off. "Now. I'm in a hurry." She rather liked the imperious feeling that came from holding a bursting purse-bag in her hand.

> "Certainly, ma'am," he said, with a gracious bow that had more

elegance than the situation required. He quickly put the items together and placed them in a bag. "Anything else?" His white teeth gleamed. <p>

"If I want something else, I'll ask," she said sharply. "Thanks anyway. Give me my bag."

"Dear, that will be two hundred and fifty Rupees. Plus sales tax, the total amounts to two hundred and seventy five Rupees. And that's on a discount!" He chortled at his own joke, but the chortle faded to a nervous titter when she glared at him. She was not the type of girl that liked encouraging much friendliness. At least not in that kind of person. She kept her face hard as she counted out the Rupees and put them in the man's greasy palm. Before he could try to beguile her into anything else, she was out.

—

Hmm, she wondered, shading her delicate eyes with her hand. It was the peak of day. _I have 275 Rupees left. I think I'll buy some non-perishables now, then head back home._

At the end of the day, she still had fifty Rupees left. She was thrifty, and she had a way of staring that made people back down and bend to her will. If she had ever seen herself in a mirror, she would have understood. But she took it for granted that her eyes' cold stare would make people feel faint.

After a long, tiring day, she returned to her home. She returned to her haven. To her pit.

Chapter 3

It had been a long time since her outing to Hyrule Market, and she had been busy. She had organized her pit a little better. In the northwest corner were all of her healing materials. She didn't quite know why, but in the Market, she had had an urge to buy them. Looking back now, she shook her head, wondering why she wasted the money. She was never ill.

On the wall of the northwest corner lived her pit's newest resident, a Gold Skulltulla named Herrez. He was the true last Skulltulla â€" number 101. He was a pleasant Skulltulla most of the time, and nice to be around. He had gone into hiding in order to avoid his slaughter â€" he had heard that his brothers had cast an evil spell on a family, and he knew that they would get their own back someday.

"Herrez," she asked, "Would you like to hear about the Outside?" She loved telling the impressionable Herrez her stories. He was full of praise for her and she loved him for it.

In his raspy voice, he replied, "Yes, dearest, if you don't mind."

She smiled. Herrez's presence always brought out that soft side of her. "When I last went to Market, the Orb was out. It was so bright, it hurt my eyes! But after a while I got used to it."

Herrez clicked his mouth parts, frowning. No one would be able to

tell his frown apart from his smile, or his smile apart from his regular expression. But she had been living with Herrez for a while. She knew.

"Haven't I ever told you what the Orb was called?" he asked.

"No. I usually call it the Orb," she explained.

"Well, it's called the sun," Herrez told her. "It always shines brightly. But some days, its power is cloaked by clouds."

"Those are the white, misshapen forms in the sky, right?" she asked. "I've heard some Hylians refer to them as clouds."

"Yes, they are," Herrez replied. "Continue with your story?"

"Of course. Well, I walked to the Market, and I see this guard, who calls me _weird_." She pouted a little bit. "I am not _weird_."

"I know," Herrez said kindly. "But you do have to think. None of the Outsiders have very open minds. They would just as soon slash _me_ as see me. And to see youâ€|my child, you have never seen yourself. That is why you don't understand. Why don't you look in the puddle, over there?" He gestured to a small muddy pool with one of his legs.

She rolled her eyes fondly. "Herrez, your eyesight is going. You know I can't see anything in that pool."

"Oh," Herrez said, sounding chagrined. "Well, perhaps one day when you stay in the Outside, you will find a mirror. Then you can look. And understand," he finished cryptically. But she could forgive him that. It was just his way.

"I don't _like_ the Outside," she sighed. "The Orb â€" I say, the sun â€" it's excessively bright. The people there are mostly horrible, greasy merchants that only look at your purse bag. You rarely see anyone that's any good there."

Herrez smiled his gentle smile. "When you live there, you learn to take the bad with the good," he said longingly. "You could never know how much I miss the Outside. You won't be able to, either, until you've lived out there and seen the sun and seen the great oceans and the moon, until you've felt wind on your face, until you've walked on the shores with no care for the worldâ€|" A little quieter, he continued. "Sweet, I know that you have been to the Outside. But you don't care for it, because you haven't _lived_ it. You haven't learned to treasure it the way I have. There's a reason poetry exists, and it's because of the Outside."

She looked down. She felt badly for Herrez, although she _knew_ that she could never feel much emotion towards the Outside. At leastâ€|not during the day.

"It is beautiful," she offered. She knew Herrez well enough to know that he had just talked himself into one of his moods.

"Yes," Herrez sighed wistfully. "I don't think I can hear any more of the Outside. I need to sleep now."

"Don't feel very bad," she pleaded. "It'll be okay. When the curse on

the family is broken, you'll be able to reach the Outside."

But she heard the familiar clicking snores of Herrez, and knew that he had already fallen asleep. Dreaming of his beloved Outside.

She closed her eyes also, and for the millionth time, her mind went back, trying to remember her life. Her life before encountering the pit, and even for a long time after, was one long, interminable blank. This frustrated and occasionally angered her. She could remember one occasion, the day after she stole Rupees from the elfin boy in the Market.

Seeing him had revived one of her greatest desires, to know the secrets her mind kept from her. She had thought and thought until her head was throbbing from the effort. "Tell me who I am!" she had shrieked at the empty walls. "Tell me _who I am!_ Give me a name, give me a home, a place â€" _tell me who I am!_" she had keened, until her energy was spent. And finally, for the first time in so many years, she had wept with bitter sadness.

"Why have I been cursed like this?" she muttered, returned to the present, her chin on her drawn-in knees. "What did I do?" She could still feel the dry tear-streaks.

That night, she still felt the tears.

Chapter 4

She walked beneath the full moon, breathing the cold night air. She loved the night so much. At times like these â€" when she was fearful, hurt, unsure of her mind's tricks â€" she loved the moon's sweet quiet light. The sun was so much more vain, so much more bright and sassy. The moon was more modest in displaying its stately beauty.

She had all the time in the world to walk. And that was what she did. She could understand what Herrez meant about the Outside, even if he was a tad bit more obsessive over it than she was. A rogue tear slid down her face, and there she let it dry.

She liked the cool night wind. It was the kind of brisk wind that, if you let it, could wipe all your doubts away. She wanted nothing more than that.

As her eyes moved to capture the picture-perfect details, she saw a lump illuminated by the moonlight. Curious by nature, she approached it carefully. Her callused feet made no noise. Then she stopped, shocked.

It was a boy! The same elfin child she had stolen from in the Market. But what had happened to him?

She bent down low to examine him. In the Market, he had looked soâ€¦childlike. Any painter's dream. Now he looked different. Maturity, purchased at a cost, and blended with a child who didn't want to let go and who wouldn't.

She touched the limp body, prodding it. _Are you alive?_ she asked him silently. He didn't look it. He was pale, his face covered in dark bruises and scratches. His clothing was in shambles, and she

could see his bones, jutting out from him. He looked more Stalchild than human.

She gave him one more prod, her eyes tearing up helplessly again. She angrily wiped them away. The boy wasn't lost yet, though why she cared, she didn't know.

The boy's body stirred, and his eyes struggled open partway, revealing tired blue. He moaned in pain and his eyes fluttered shut again. She could hear his breathing now, ragged and irregular.

—

Wait! her mind cried.

Hadn't she known someone â€" once upon a time â€" hadn't she seen someone just like him? Someone, maybe, close to her? Breathing like this?

She had had a toy, a spinning toyâ€|and then the breather's head dropped back, and the eyes went blankâ€|

She gasped. That person had died.

And then she felt a surge of joy. She had _remembered!_ She had remembered something, one small detail in her past. Perhaps, over time, she would learn more and more things.

She looked down at the young face. She couldn't allow he who triggered such a memory die. And his sight seemed to thaw the ice she built around her heart, to melt it so that she didn't need it to protect her.

Gingerly, she shifted him into her arms. He was much smaller and lighter than she was, so it wasn't that much of a challenge. But she didn't want to hurt him. He was already at death's threshold. But this time as she picked him up, he didn't stir. Running as fast as she dared, she darted back into the pit.

She looked around wildly for a suitable place to put him. She slept on a bed of moss â€" that had to be good enough for anyone. She lowered him gently onto the damp green, and fetched the blue fire salve she had gotten at the Market. _I should have gotten a fairy_, she chided herself. She applied the salve over his eyes, then watched, occasionally wiping her forehead.

For a long time, the eyes didn't open. When they finally staggered open, the boy had strength only for one word: "Ganondorf." It seemed like all the terror and hatred, all the resentment and courage of a lifetime had been poured into the one weakly whispered word.

"No, no," she said. "I don't know who Ganondorf is. I found you," she explained, her voice shaking, "and I brought you here to heal you."

His forehead furrowed as he tried to understand. She put her hand to his forehead. It felt like putting her hand in a live fire. He shivered violently.

"Hush," she soothed. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Then she noticed a little blue ball darting protectively around him. "What's this?" she asked.

The boy shifted slightly in response. She hadn't noticed. He was already sleeping, sleep brought on by his dangerously high fever.

"Poor boy," she said softly. She applied some of the salve to his forehead. She didn't know much, but at least she knew how to keep down a fever. She drew her tattered, ragged blanket up to his chin. _Don't die_, she pleaded silently.

Chapter 5

"Herrez," she whispered. "Herrez, wake up!"

"What is it, dear," he mumbled sleepily. Then his eyes focused on Link's sleeping, shivering figure and he was instantly awake. "My child, what have you done?!" he cried.

"Herrez, keep it down, please," she warned immediately. "I found this boy in the Outside, just like he is now, and I brought him in hereâ€|"

"Why?" Herrez demanded sharply, all gentleness gone from his voice.

She looked down, and she could see that sole memory of hers being replayed again and again. "He reminded me of somebody. Oh Herrez, you wouldn't be able to understandâ€|I've lived here all my life and I never remembered anything -- but I saw this boy so close to deathâ€|He reminded me of someone I had seen when I was very, very young. Someone with a beautiful face who breathed just as he breathed now." She was silent for a moment, for Herrez to hear his laboring gasps. More quietly now, she continued. "Herrez, I don't know who that person was. But she â€" or he, though it must have been a she - died. In this pit."

She dug in the pocket of the worn outfit she wore and brought out something dangling on a chain. In the darkness of the pit, the Triforce symbol shone ever the more brightly. She brought it close to Herrez, right up to his face. "Herrez!" she cried softly, letting the necklace speak for itself, "I _remember_! Can't you understand how much I've needed at least one memory, Herrez? I may not remember much, just how one dying person breathed, I don't even know who that person was or what the person was doing here, but praise the Goddesses, I know a person _was_ here!"

Herrez clicked anxiously. "But don't you remember about the Outsiders?" he burst out. "None of them would take any time to learn about me as you did, dear heart â€" they kill my brothers upon sight! That boy isn't any different from the rest, he'll whip out that blade by his side â€" did you notice that blade?" he asked in wild panic. "He'll take it and slice me in half, two slices and I'm done for!" He wailed, "I sacrificed the Outside for my safety and now I'm ruined!"

"Shut _up_!" she hissed, her yellow eyes brightening angrily. "The

boy is in no condition right now to kill anything and he needs my help! Herrez, do you have a heart at all or are you merciless and cruel? Do you think I can just let him die? After what he's done for me, it doesn't matter if he did nothing intentionally, in memory of the person that died here, he'll LIVE!" she cried fiercely

Herrez looked hurt, but now she was mad, madder than she had ever been.

"Herrez, you call me dear, you call me sweet. If you care for me at all, if you love me like a parent to a child as you've told me so many times, than you should be happy! Happy that I've finally found a part of my memory, a precious memory! If you think that a boy near death is going to attack you with mythical strength, then you're the stupidest creature I've ever encountered! Go on, whine and sulk! But I'm not letting you change my mind, because right now this boy is everything to me, my link to my past! And if you don't like it, I don't care what happens, leave!" She pointed, her finger trembling, to the exit pad. "Go to your beloved Outside!" she jabbed harshly.

A long moment passed before Herrez slowly and silently descended the wall. The silence was so thick that had she not been so furious, she would have reached out to try and grab a bit of it. He scuttled, awkward on the ground and with a slight sideways tilt. And with not so much as a single backward glance, he climbed on to the exit pad.

She would never see him again.

Chapter 6

Time had passed, like time tends to do. A lot of times, she missed Herrez. His easy praise. His poetic ways. But the memory of why he walked out would suffice to make her eyes blaze. And she felt she was better off without him. She didn't need him and never had. In his own way, he was a true Gold Skulltulla â€" a vicious cheat.

For the first few days and nights, she stayed by the boy's side, keeping watch constantly. She would dip her hands into a puddle and pour it on his face, open his mouth and put food inside, hoping that he would somehow automatically chew and swallow. A lot of times, he did. But he stayed in his sleep.

Because she feared moving him, she wouldn't apply bandages, and applied blue fire salve only to those places she could reach without moving him. To make the time pass quickly, she talked aimlessly. She knew that he couldn't hear her. She also knew that he probably was going to die, and sometimes wondered why she had taken on this hopeless charge. But then she remembered that one, treasured memory, and then she knew.

Then, one day, he spoke. It was in little more than a whisper â€" but he hadn't spoken since that first night she had brought him into her pit.

"Who are you?" he croaked hoarsely, not opening his eyes.

"If only I knew," she replied, and was quiet.

"Please keep talking," he requested, and opened his eyes.

"Why?" she asked in astonishment.

His eyes blinked. "Your voiceâ€|when I was sleeping. Kept finding me. Gave me something to hold on to â€" aah!" he cried. He had tried to sit up.

"What is it?" she asked quickly, bandages and blue fire salve at the ready.

"My ribs â€" I moved, and my ribs," he moaned, pain cutting every syllable short. But it seemed like the sharp pain had wakened him. His wits were back.

Without wasting any more time, she lifted up his tattered green tunic. His skin underneath was torn, scabbed, bruised and swollen. She could tell that at least one rib was broken. "Oh, Farore, Nayru, Din," she whispered uncomfortably, "help meâ€|" It would take a miracle to heal him. The condition his leg alone was in required a Potions master, the type found roaming Hyrule Market.

But inexplicably, she felt warmth and peace rush through her. It was like the first time she had seen the moon. And she knew she could heal him. She knew she would do it.

"Listen, Link," she said. "I'll try my best to heal you, okay?"

Link nodded. And even if his blue eyes faded in and out of focus, they still had a spark in there, shining.

"Alright. First, I'm going to bind up your leg. It might hurt, but only for a little bit. I need it to heal straight."

"So do I," Link quipped, lying back down again. She smiled, then looked around for two sticks she could use.

"What do you need?" Link asked.

"Two sticks," she replied, her voice muffled by searching under a sickly bush.

"You can look in my pack," he told her. "I think I still have some Deku Sticks, I didn't use them much in Jabu â€" I mean," he stuttered, "I think I have Deku Sticks."

She blinked, his slip gone unnoticed by her. "That would mean sticks. Like wood from trees, right? I've never heard of Deku."

"Yep." Link wrinkled his nose. "Let's hope I still have some left, after my little adventure."

She gently removed his pack and rummaged through it. "What do you mean, your adventure?"

Link hesitated visibly. "You wouldn't tell? Oh, that's right â€"

"

"Who do I have to tell?" she finished, laughing. "The walls? Oh, here they are," she said, referring to two straight Deku Sticks she

clutched. "A little wet, but let's hope they're okay." She concentrated on removing her belt. "What were you saying?"

Link wasn't listening. He was watching. "What are you doing?" he asked, his face taking on a look of wary fascination.

"Huh?" She looked up, then back down at her belt. "I have to make you a splint, at least, and I need something to tie it with." She sighed. "I wish I had something a little stronger, but as you can probably tell, I don't accumulate many quality things in here, unless â€" She stopped suddenly. She was about to say, unless I steal it from some wealthy merchant, but felt suddenly filthy for being such a thief. She was certain Link had never stolen a thing in his life. She swallowed. "I mean, brace yourself." She put the sticks around his leg, one under, one over, and wrapped the belt â€" or rather, the rotting piece of cloth â€" loosely around his leg. "I'm going to count to five. Then I'm going to yank the belt tight."

Link bit his lip and shut his eyes tightly.

"Oneâ€|um, sevenâ€|fourteenâ€|twenty-oneâ€|"

Link opened an eye curiously.

"Five." She yanked.

"Owww!" Link howled in pain. "Why didn't you count in order? Is it that you don't know your numbers?"

"Of course I know my numbers, I just wanted to catch you while you were relaxed," she bluffed. She sat back and wiped her forehead. "That was agonizing," she commented.

"You don't know the half of it," Link retorted, sitting up again. Then he winced, trying to hide it. But her eagle eyes caught the movement.

"I almost forgot! Your ribs!" she cried.

"Take pity," Link groaned, hiding a smile. "I'm just a poor little kid. Don't hurt me." He held his hands up.

"You have a sword and shield on your person, my dear boy," she said bluntly. "Don't come on to me with that. I'm guessing you didn't get your wounds pleading with your attackers not to hurt you."

Link had a strange look on his face â€" like a child who pledged to keep a secret, and desperately wants to break that pledge. "Why do you guess that?" he asked carefully.

"Sit up," she muttered. Link wobbled, wanting to lie back down, but obliged. "I'm guessing that," she continued, "because you just don't look like the kind of person who would back into a corner and beg for your life. You look like the kind of person who would be forced into a corner and fight your way right out."

Link smiled, despite the hurt that was plaguing him and the hurt he feared to come. Because she wasn't wrong.

It had been such a very long time â€" she didn't know how long. But her life was happier than it had ever been. The gloomy pit's walls echoed with laughter and jokes the two exchanged.

Link had been almost completely healed. Though she had to reduce her dress to nearly embarrassing proportions in order to bind the Deku Sticks Link needed for a crutch, she had done so gladly. Besides, she was a stranger to modesty and all its strange rules. The bandages on his ribs were now there for support. Not knowing and not wanting to test Link's health, she had insisted that they stay, even when Link insisted they weren't needed anymore.

"Where did you find me?" Link asked one day, out of the blue. It was his usual and preferred way of asking questions. He loved startling her. And her typical response never failed.

"Huh?"

"No, I'm serious. For once. My memory of you starts with that infernal leg-binding procedure. Where did you find me? I can't have just â€" appeared."

"I wouldn't put you past it," she said with a grin. Her yellow eyes glinted in the darkness.

He groaned good-naturedly. "Could you just answer the question?"

"I was out for a walk in the moonlight. I felt bad, and moonlight is usually a good way for me to feel better. Not that my life is full of dramatic ups and downs. But I felt miserable," she said, her voice taking on that protective edge it sometimes took.

"Not to interrupt," Link interrupted. "But it's kind of weird that moonlight makes you feel better. For a lot of people, it's sunlight. At least it is for me," he said with a shrug. "Though I can't be the most extremely normal of people." He looked a little unhappy.

"Well, I'm not most people," she replied shortly. "The sunlight's too bright. It hurts my eyes."

"That's another thing," Link continued, changing subjects rapidly. It was a habit that consistently put her off, but that he didn't bother correcting. "Your eyes. They look a lot likeâ€|well, Ganondorf's eyes. Their color and all. Not many people have yellow eyes."

"Oh, so that's their color. Neat. You said that, once," she recalled. "When I first brought you in here? The first word you said â€" and it took you a while to say it, too â€" was 'Ganondorf'. I told you I didn't know who Ganondorf is, but I guess it escaped you. You were so sick," she said, her mind's eye painting the picture that had given her that memory back.

"Well, you do look a lot like him, just not with the brutish ugliness factor. You have more detail in your face," Link said matter-of-factly. She noticed, however, that he carefully averted his eyes when he said this.

"Who is Ganondorf?" She repeated the eternal question. "Whenever I ask, you change the subject."

"The reason I'm here," he muttered.

"Oh, then he must be reasonably good," she joked lightly. But Link took her seriously.

"No, no _no_!" His round blue eyes, for once, were in earnest. "Ganondorf is the most evil of all evils. He killed the Great Deku Tree, he plotted against the King of Hyrule, and he starved the Gorons!" He dug in his pack and with a flash, three small stones lay in his hand. "For these!"

"Wow," she murmured. She leaned closer. The stones were things of beauty, made with loving care, many-faceted and gleaming. One was green, and inside, it spoke of the wonder of nature and all its swirls of life. One was red, and spoke with pride of a legacy of Earth and its servants. And one was calm blue, and the light rippled inside it, speaking of another world contained in water. "They're so beautiful." Because Link's attention was focused on the Stones, she stole the moment for a quick gaze at his face.

> "They're called Spiritual Stones." Link spoke almost angrily now. "There are only three and inside they hold all the power of Earth, Forest and Fire â€" and the key to opening the Door of Time, which leads to the Sacred Realm containing the Triforce. And the Triforce is the most sacred thing of all, three golden triangles left by Hyrule's goddesses at the end of the world's creation, at the point where they left for the heavens. They represent courage, wisdom and power â€" and Ganondorf wants them to take over Hyrule." He stared at the beautiful stones in his hand, turning them over, touching them, then quickly put them back in his pack.<p>

"But I'm not letting him do it."

That last part, Link's whisper, almost to himself, caught her attention, though she hadn't understood half the tale. Still, she could catch the gist of it. "How can you stop him?" she asked solemnly.

A proud smile slipped across his face. "Because I have these Spiritual Stones. They're what Ganondorf needs to get into the Sacred Realm. Now all I have to do is head back to see Zelda one more time."

"Oh. Zelda," she said uncertainly. "Zelda is Hyrule's princess, right?"

"Yup," Link answered. "I met her. She's really nice. She told me about her prophetic dream, and inside the dream was a figure holding up a green stone, with a fairy trailing after it." He shrugged modestly. "I guess the person from her dream was me. Though why I'd be stuck somewhere in her dreams, I don't know."

"That's amazing," she remarked. "So how did you get these stones of yours?"

"I fought for them," he said simply. Then he looked stricken. "Oh Goddesses, I should have met Zelda a while ago! She'll be wondering what's keeping me!" He got up from the bed of moss. She had been helping him relearn skills like sword fighting and walking.

"No! Wait!" she cried out. Link was unraveling the bandages underneath his tunic.

"I owe you big time," he said, sounding as if he was fighting to control his voice. "I can't say much, but I hope that just by saying 'thank you' you'll know what I mean." Finished with the bandages, he removed his splint. His leg had healed perfectly.

"Don't leave me. Please," she begged, forgetting all of her pride. She didn't want to be all alone again. She didn't think she could stand it, not after having a taste of human companionship. And sheâ€|to her, Link was almost more than a friend.

Link had been about to step on the exit pad. But he turned around and ran suddenly to her. She had been sitting on the ground, watching him, and the cry for him to stay had accidentally left her lips. He knelt, and he put his arms around her and hugged her tightly. And when he pulled away, she could see there were tears in his eyes.

"Let me come with you," she said. Almost immediately she bit her tongue, wondering just _how_ beggar-like that sounded.

Link nodded, and there was a strange look on his face as he watched her get up to go.

> <p>

Chapter 8

It was day, bright shining day, when they exited the pit. Immediately she ducked her head. "I hate the sun," she muttered, and shaded her eyes with her hand.

"Don't say that," Link said distractedly. His voice was oddly distant. "If you'll look up, the sunâ€|it's disappearing."

"What?" She looked up and found, to her immense surprise, that her hand didn't need to shade her eyes anymore. Dark, ominous clouds were covering the sun's brightness. "Waitâ€|this isn't good."

"I know," Link said, his voice again with that strange ring to it. "The Hylian sky is always, always blue."

She was silent. It had started raining heavily. The raindrops were almost hailstones, and within minutes, she and Link were soaked. The sky was as dark as night now.

Then, the Hyrule Market drawbridge creaked open in a hurry. Two riders on a beautiful white horse were galloping away as quickly as possible. The smaller passenger's bright blue eyes were large and frightened, and the larger rider was holding on to her protectively. The horse already seemed to know where to go and was running to that unknown destination as quickly as possible.

The girl with the frightened blue eyes looked at Link, who stepped forward slightly. He must have known he couldn't catch up to the racing horse. She threw something as hard as her small arm would allow her to. A blue object arced through the air, and landed with a plop in the castle moat. Then the horse and its passengers were out of sight.

"Listen," Link whispered. "You need to run. Now. I think I know who's coming" now _hide! You don't want to see him!_"

She had never seen anything like it. Not the heavy rainfall, now punctuated by bursts of lighting and thunder, nor the escaping passengers on the pure white horse. Unconsciously, she reached in her pocket and fingered the gold Triforce necklace, whose origin she did not know. Then she ran as quickly as she could, to a huge boulder a-ways behind her. Still, though, she peeked from the side of the boulder. She couldn't help it, curiosity being an indelible part of her personality.

The other horse's hoof beats were heavy, clunking against the dull wood of the drawbridge and later against the damp earth. The horse was black, as black as night, as black as a thousand horrible deaths. It _was_ beautiful, if you went for that kind of thing. But it was the rider that was the true horror.

There could be no doubt that the rider was the Ganondorf Link had told her about. He certainly was ugly, and it wasn't just the evil that emanated from him. He had dark skin with a tint of green to it. His nose was large and straight and gave him an eagle profile. He had bright, flaming red hair that trickled across his face to form his eyebrows. But underneath the eyebrows, cruel yellow eyes glinted. His head seemed too small for his enormous towering body. For a mere moment, the eyes flashed towards her and they connected. She shuddered, but the mean, striking rider wasn't interested in her. His black horse reared and shrieked a neigh. Lightning crackled across the sky and ripped it into dark pieces.

Ganondorf " for that was who he was " turned towards Link. "Hey, kid," he yelled. "Did you see a white horse go past?"
> Link's eyes were on the rider. Then without warning, he whipped out his sword and crouched, ready for a fight.<p>

Ganondorf laughed, a deep, terrifying chuckle. "I like your attitude, kid!" He smiled a smile without mirth, but plentiful in disdain.

—

Link, you moron, she thought desperately. _You can't fight this man, just look at him!_ Still, she had to admire his courage.

Then the man, still smirking, brought up his hand. Black light fled to it as if his hand was a magnet. The light collected, and in a millisecond jetted out at Link and hit him square in the chest. Link yelled and flew backwards, knocked by the impact.

Ganondorf ran off in hot pursuit of the white horse, leaving Link on the ground.

With Ganondorf gone, the sky began to return to its normal state. The dark rain clouds dissipated slowly, letting the trapped blue free. But the clouds lurked still on the horizon, ready to swallow the blue again at an unknown signal.

Link stayed down, shocked. She ran out and up to Link and immediately let loose a torrent. "Link, are you inSANE?" she shrieked. "How could

you DO that?! Didn't you see how powerful that man is? Didn't you?! If he's done ALL the evil things you told me, then HOW IN HYRULE DID YOU EXPECT TO DEFEAT HIM WITH A LITTLE DAGGER?!?"

For an answer, Link dove into the moat.

"NOW what are you doing? Do you KNOW how scared I was? You could have been KILLED! In fact, if I had been that man I probably would have finished you off just as easy PREY!" she spat. She looked down into the moat and saw Link diving, grabbing at something with his hands. He went up for air for a second and gave her a quick thumbs-up, then went back down.

She rolled her eyes. _He's not listening. That Link has a real mind of his own sometimes. And by the Goddesses, what_a_mind!_

--

Her teasingly derisive thoughts were interrupted by Link's triumphant cry. "Hah!" he yelled. "Ha hah!" He had surfaced with a loud splashing noise and climbed up out of the boat. "Look at this!"

"What?" she asked. She dismissed it. "It's a blue spheroid with holes in it."

"No." Link shook his blond head, and water splattered from his drenched locks. "It's the Ocarina of Time." His face was shining. "Don't you remember the legend I told you once?" he asked gently. "I told you about the three stonesâ€|in the Temple of Time, there's an altar, with three empty spaces. Navi pointed out an inscription to me. It said, 'Ye who stand here with three spiritual stones/the Ocarina of Time/and the Song of Timeâ€|' Then it mysteriously ended. All I need is the Song of â€" "

Suddenly, Link's face went blank. His eyes were far away, as if watching something else only he could see. She glanced in the direction he was watching but saw nothing, just a Peahat whirring about in the blue horizon.

"Link? Link?" The look in his eyes was almost eerie. It was transformational. He was nodding slightly.

Then it was over, and he was back to normal â€" almost. His eyes were â€" different, as if he was looking through and over and around things.

> "Link," she said in a low voice, "what happened?"
 Link looked down at the blue Ocarina in his hand. He looked haunted, scared. "It's really happened," he whispered in awe. His happy, almost cocky attitude had disappeared. "I have the Song of Timeâ€|the Ocarina of Timeâ€|and the three Spiritual Stones."

"Link! Will you tell me what happened?!" she yelled. She was not angry â€" she was frightened for him, frightened for his future.

"I have everything I need!" he yelled back. "All of it! I can open the Door of Time! Do you know how many people have tried to do that? Do you _know?_ Of course you don't because you've been living in a _pit_! But now I have what's needed. Don't you understand?" He was subdued now, his anger spent. "I'm going to be history. I'm going to

be legendâ€| " He trailed off and looked down again at the innocent-appearing Ocarina. Still looking down at it, he said, "Maybe you can't understand. Zelda â€" Princess Zelda, she just spoke to me. She told me to go to the Temple and play the songâ€|that by the time I received this Ocarina, she'd be gone. I don't know what's behind that door in the Temple, and for all its goodness, I don't want to see the Sacred Realm. I want to stay here, in Hyrule, in Kokiri. But I can't keep pretending that Kokiri's my home. I know it's not. And I have to go to the Temple." For a fleeting moment, Link looked as miserable as she had the night she walked under the moon. Then he shook it off and looked up at her, straight in her face, right in her yellow eyes.

"I'll miss you," Link said, all humor gone from his face. She ached for that easygoing expression to return. "I'll never forget what you did for me. No matter how old I grow. Do youâ€|understand what I'm trying to say?"

"Yeah," she whispered. "I understand."

Instinctively, she reached out for him and caught him in a hug. Before she knew it, she was crying softly into his shoulder. With a shock, she realized he was doing the same. For a moment, they stood comforting each other without words. Then Link pulled away and wiped his face. The echo of his smile returned for a moment.

"Go on, Link. Be a hero."

The sun began to dip below the horizon, throwing red and orange and evening purple into the sky. Illuminated by the day's last glow of light, Link ran into Hyrule Market. Running, frightened she knew, but still running towards his destiny. What courage. The drawbridge creaked up after him, closing the town up for the night.

"Goodbye," she said to the bridge.

**_

The Power of Memory

Part Two : The Temple of Memory

_**

Chapter 1

She was cold. She was hungry. And she was very, very tired.

The last six years had been torture for her. A boulder had blocked the entrance to her pit, and she was forced to live in the Outside. The sun rarely bothered her anymore, because it rarely came out anymore. The field's animals had all starved to death, so that Hyrule Field was nothing more than a barren wasteland.

The harsh, icy wind blowing from Zora's Domain raised goosebumps on her arm. She shivered and hugged herself, looking bleakly at the dead field. Peahats were a pain, she thought, but I would prefer to have them rather than thisâ€|thisâ€|emptiness._

--

She couldn't even see the moon anymore.

"Someone has to do something," she mumbled, her lips numb with cold. "Link, where are you? Can't you see Hyrule needs you? You can't just disappear!"

If she could have, she would have gone to Kakariko Village. All of the Hylians that had been ejected from their homes had escaped to Kakariko. For some reason, she wasn't welcome there. The first time she had tried to enter, the villagers kicked her out, with strict orders never to return. She recalled the half-fright, half-hatred look on their faces, and in her delirious mind wondered if it had to do with what Link had told her once. "You look like Ganondorf."

--

These days, it was all she could do to forage for food. The occasional dying scrub and ill rabbit was a royal feast to her, for she was not welcome anywhere. The people would take one look at her face, and they would rise in a torrent to remove her from sight. "Can't they see, can't they see," her fevered mind repeated over and over. "I don't want to hurt them, I'm not Ganondorf, I don't even know who he is, I swear it, I swear it, I swear it!"

--

She looked up at the sky. Maybe maybe today the sun would come out. She would welcome even the sun's searing rays. If only it meant that the flaming cloud halo around Death Mountain would disappear. If only it meant that the heavy clouds would go away and let Hyrule be Hyrule again.

—

"Who is this Ganondorf, anyway?" she asked herself blearily. Her memory was leaving her. She was aware of this, and yet had no power to stop it. She could barely lift up her hand. And even that took tremendous willpower.

She sank into a deep sleep. Perhaps it would be her final.

—

"Who are you?" the man on guard asked. He gripped his sword. Already, I could see the sweat forming on his hand. "Who are you?"
> I held out my hands. "Please. I'm not here to harm you. I need refuge, a place to stay!"

"Gerudo!" the man spat. "Go to your master, Ganondorf," he jeered. "Go! You are not welcome in Kakariko."

Why? What had I ever done to them? Couldn't they see I was as needy as they were, if not more?

The scene dissolved. I was another person. In a way I was asleep, or awake? Dreaming, or reality? For that matter, where was I?

—

_I was aware that I was being held in place. I knew it. Something was stopping me from doing what I wanted to do. What I needed to do. _Go back to Hyrule, Link, _ my mind kept saying. But something else kept pushing those thoughts away. Telling me I wasn't ready yet. It would only be a matter of time, the voice reassured me, a matter of timeâ€|_

—

I thought ironically, isn't everything?

Again, the scene dissolved. Now I was myself again, and look - in front of me was the Triforce! The Triforce! The granter of all wishes, good and bad, noble and evil. My wish isn't evil! I clamored. I'm not evil!

To my surprise, the Triforce spoke back. "Yes you are," it sneered derisively. "You don't even know who you are. You're not even worthy of the title of 'Street Rat'. You're like nothing. You don't even have any memory."

"It's not my fault," I begged. "Pleaseâ€|I just need to know who I amâ€|I need a reassurance, something, anything! Tell me anything! What has happened to Hyrule, what has happened to me?" I reached out, my hands grabbing.

"Look at yourself!" the Triforce commanded, growing larger and larger, now as glossy as a mirror. "Look!"

I looked. There was a face, with dark, tanned skin. Yellow eyes swept upwards. A straight, even nose. Long, furiously red hair that tumbled far beyond my shoulders.

"Look at that!" the Triforce bellowed. "Who have you seen like this?"

I pushed it away. "No!" I cried. "You lie! NO!"

"Yes," the Triforce hissed. "No matter what you do, it will be true. You're not worthy of anything. You are nothing, nothing!"

"No, no, no!" I screamed in terror. I backed away.

The Triforce shattered into a million pieces, and a million pieces settled into my brain. They were stealing my memory from me, my lifeâ€|the boy with the blue eyesâ€|the woman with the necklaceâ€|the man who had shaken me, hardâ€|the princess on the snow-white horseâ€|the golden spiderâ€|

NOOOOOOOOOO!! I shrieked. But I was powerless to stop it. Powerless . . as the Triforce had doomed meâ€|

—

_ _She awakened, shaking. "It's not true," she whispered into the air. The wind gladly carried the words away. "It was only a dream."

But if that was true, why couldn't she remember anything? Already, her dream was gone. She remembered nothing. Nothing.

—

Something's wrong, she thought. She forced herself to stand up. She hadn't survived the last six years for nothing. _I know something's wrong. Don't all people have memory? But I —

— —

She cut off the last part. She knew that when you say something in your mind, it's irreversible. And completing the thought in her mind would finish her.

Chapter 2

She could hear the wind howling like a bereaved beast, right in her ear. It was frustrating. It prevented her from hearing other things, other things that might have been more important. _Then again_, she thought, a sardonic smile playing on her frozen lips, _there's not much to hear. Hyrule is dead._

— —

She jumped across the broken drawbridge that led to Hyrule Market. Or used to. The sign that had informed her of this was old, stained by water, cracked in two. It couldn't have been the most recent posting.

The Market, which once upon a time had been filled with life, was infested with filthy things, zombies, shadows of life. The Redeads. Their name was self-explanatory. _The way irony works_, she thought, that strange new smile playing on her lips again.

She remembered all of the little things. She knew this had once been Hyrule Market. She knew that she was around 16. Probably, considering her body. She knew that Hyrule was dead. She knew all of the vague, huge details, and none of the little, much-loved details. She knew everything except what she most yearned to know.

As she passed through the Market, her mind not connecting, she didn't notice that no Redead came up to her. Not one. They left her be, when they would have assailed any other hapless traveler. She stumbled for a moment on a loose cobblestone, dizzy, and fell on her knees. Her hand groped for something to help her back up and found an old wooden beam, chewed by flames and rotting. That would have to do.

Outside and free of the gloomy Market, she leaned on her stick. Just a bit in front of her was Ganondorf's castle. That was what she had come to find. The sight of it, big, black and ugly, standing where the proud castle of the King of Hyrule once had like a boil on the fields, made her bow her head and give a small moment of silence. But she would see Ganondorf.

Her idea, she thought, had been almost a stroke of genius. Ganondorf had killed Hyrule. He had destroyed Hyrule Market, frozen Zora's Domain, and frightened Kakariko's residents out of their wits. The

power it must have taken, she marveled at it. Maybe he could answer her questions.

She snorted at the stupidity of it all. _Yes, I'll walk up and say, "Please mister, I've lived in a pit for ten years and been an outcast for six and a half more and I'd like you to tell me who I am." He's not a saint, obviously, if he's done all this_, she reminded herself for the umpteenth time. But that was quickly polished over by the question she felt had always haunted her: _Who am I?_

--

She hobbled closer, trusting the stick to carry her weight. It wasn't much to carry. Then she leaned forward in fascination for a moment, disregarding the wind's obsession with shoving hair in her face. The castle was floating " above this strange red substance! She had never seen lava. It looked to her, for all the world, like a huge red carpet, or perhaps a moat with red water. Maybe even blood.

And " oh, the glory! The red " it generated the most beautiful, the most magnificent warmth. For a moment, she almost broke down and wept. It had been so long since she had felt such warmth " in fact, she had never felt such warmth, period.

Here happened a more extraordinary thing. The castle was suspended in the air above the lake of boiling lava. But she, with no aids, no magical shoes or tunics, walked across the lava as blithely as if she were strolling to the park. The pleasant warmth did not increase nor decrease, but continued to massage her. She walked right _up_ to the castle.

And when she looked back, she did not notice that a single thing seemed queer. It was natural for her to easily walk not only across the lava, but climb up the air and reach the castle.

Upon reaching it, it was mere child's play to open the door. She pushed the eerie doors open, trying not to pay attention to the feeling of fear and horror the castle gave her. But it was hard not to.

She ran through the castle. There were six odd doors, and a strangely shaped"thing"in the center of the room. It must have been a force field of some kind. For now, it was deactivated.

Then she gave out. She had walked a long distance, and she was far from perfect health. It had to come sooner or later " she collapsed. Right on the frigid castle floor.

Chapter 3

She could feel cold metal on her wrists. She heard someone in front of her pacing. The sound echoed in the room.

She opened her eyes. She was in a stone, circular room, chained to the wall by hands and feet. Far away, she could hear a steady drip. There was a man in front of her, staring at the opposite wall, his back to her.

The moment she opened her eyes, the man turned. Sly yellow eyes studied her carefully.

"Well, well." He spoke for the first time. It was a low, deep voice, full of malevolence. "What have we here?"

"I â€"

"SILENCE!" the man demanded, holding up a huge, gnarled hand. He stepped forward smoothly and lifted her chin up so he could study her better. He looked hard into her eyes until she feared she would pass out again.

"Who are you?" she asked with barely contained hysteria.

The man smiled a strange smile. If only she knew, she had worn the same sardonic smile but a short time before. "I should be asking you that." He abruptly removed his hand, but did not stop his inspection. "How did you get here?"

She felt sure that man could see all the memories she couldn't. "I walked," she answered haughtily, averting her eyes, not able to control her voice's wobble.

"I see." The man raised a brow. "I'll need a better answer than that, Sorceress. It is not possible to simply _walk_ across lava."

"I am not a sorceress â€" I know not of what you speak. There was much red, but it was warm and pleasant." She looked up at him. He seemed familiar from somewhere, but she couldn't quite place him on her mind's blank slateâ€|

She gasped at the same time his eyes widened. Her mind was racing. _The yellow eyes, girl, look at the eyes! And the hairâ€|the furiously red hairâ€|you two share these characteristicsâ€|that meansâ€|_

--

"No," she whispered. It was a slip.

Now the man looked shrewd. Thoughtful. "You walked across lava to get here, huh." Another brooding pause. "Precious few people can do that. And you say the lava was merely warm. It didn't bother you at all."

She squeezed her eyes shut. _No, no no no no no no no no no, _ she kept moaning inside. _Remember, as long as you don't think it, it's not true. No, no, don't think it._

--

"The only way," the man continued, "you can walk across lava and find it 'warm' is if you have powerful magical skills. And/or, you are not aware of these skills." She tried to shut his voice out. But his voice was everywhere. It was not the kind of voice anyone shuts out. "Skills of these sort are often inherited."

> No, no, no, no, please, no â€"

--

"Open your eyes," the man commanded.

Against her will, she found them opening. He stared into them again. She squirmed under the intense glare. "Do you know who I am?" the man asked.

"You areâ€|Ganondorf. Hyrule's _murderer_," she responded bitingly, trying to quiet her mind.

"Correct. Indeed I _am_ Ganondorf, now Ruler of Hyrule, and holder of the Triforce of Power! The Triforce I worked so hard to gain. You _do_ understand sacrifice of that sort, don't you," he said-asked. She could feel him ruffling with ease through her mind, back to her early, early, earliest days, while still blocking those memories from her. She could have screamed. Finally, he stepped away as if satisfied. She looked at him as if he were a judge about to deliver a death sentence.

"You're my daughter," he said, with as little emotion as if he had been a Gossip Stone announcing the hour. Then again, there weren't many Gossip Stones strewn around Hyrule in that day and time.

"NO!" she cried. But it had been said. She lunged forward, trying to free herself from the wall and the chains, trying toâ€|to what?

She did not take her eyes off him. They were narrowed to the merest slits. In the dank light of the dungeon room, she looked catlike. Her hair was plastered to her back from the mildew on the wall and from her own sweat, and she looked about to pounce, if you dismissed the strong chains holding her back. She could feel her heart pounding, being fed on rushes of adrenaline.

"It makes perfect, perfect sense." The man admired his genius. "I should have figured it out sooner. I exiled Natefeema to the pit, and the child followed her."

"Stop it." Her voice rose to a plea on the last word.

"I never did anything to the _daughter_," he continued. "She must have lived on. I do clearly remember, she was a strong little one. Intelligent enough, and looked a lot like myself." The look in his eyes shifted now, almost to hunger. "Of course, being my daughter, you would have to have some magic in you. I know it must have shown up only recently, of course, magic has that annoying habit. Imagine. My power, supplemented by yoursâ€|"

"NO!" she screamed. "It can't be, you're EVIL!" She rattled the chains as hard as she could.

"Then why did you come here?" Ganondorf's voice was like the cold wind that had blown in from Zora's Domain.

"I wanted to find out who I am!"

"Well now you know!" Ganondorf spat, his patience (or lack thereof) evaporating. "You're _mine_, _my_ daughter, to do with as I please!"

"I just want to remember my memories. That's all I came here for." She breathed in, a shuddering breath, deleting the urge to burst into tears and yet unable to stop one from spilling over.

Ganondorf sighed impatiently. "In your own way, you're as big a baby as Natefeema was. She was beautiful and that was her extent."

"Stop lying to me." She shook her head. "I know it can't be true, I'm not evil, I'm not like you at all."

Ganondorf smirked. "Oh really?" His voice was smug. "Not like me at all? If you have no memory, how do you know you haven't been as 'evil' as I've been?"

"Aaarrrrgh!" she cried in frustration. "I justâ€¦know!"

"So, you want your memory." Ganondorf's brain whirred. How could he use this to bring her over to his side? "What if I told you that if you worked with me, I'd give you those memories back?"

She eyed him with large, apprehensive eyes. Beautiful. "I'd say you were an untrustworthy pig," she dared bravely.

"If you weren't my daughter, you'd be dead right now," Ganondorf said lightly, skipping the inchoate _and if I didn't need you_. "Honestly. How else can you recover your memory?" His voice was nowâ€¦calmingâ€¦like silkâ€¦likeâ€¦ "Wasn't that what you came here for?"

She took a while in answering, dazed by the spell he had laced his voice with. "Yeah, Iâ€¦need my memory. Badly."

"Is that your greatest desire?" Ganondorf inquired smoothly, not able to repress a cruel grin.

"All my life, it's all I've ever really wanted." She sounded zoned out.

"Then listen. I can give you all your memory back. All of it. But only if you help me build a temple."

"What temple?"

Ganondorf let himself chuckle. It was ironic, really. And he knew the Hero of Time would be coming soon â€" in less than a year. This would surely give him one extra challenge.

"The Temple of Memory."

Chapter 4

She was proud of her work.

The Memory Temple was almost complete. It was going to be perfect. The Hero of Time that Ganondorf had told her about would have a great challenge with it.

Ganondorf had told her all about this hero. He had cleverly set up a plan. Perhaps the Hero â€" if very, extremely lucky â€" would manage to get past all six temples. But there was one more that he had to pass. It was an invisible temple. It would appear only when the Hero had beaten Ganondorf's castle and was on his way to the final confrontation. The Hero would be furious upon learning that the

"Ganondorf's Castle" was actually an illusion, and that the real Castle was hiding behind the Memory Temple! Not only that, but the real Castle would not open until he defeated the Memory Temple!

Though Ganondorf had come up with the concept, she was the one who had made it reality. She knew that time was short, and so had accepted a short training period. She had never felt such pride as when she used her magical skills to accomplish some small task in the training room. It gave her a feeling of self-accomplishment. Of doing something.

Her face glowed. She was " for the first time in her life " the picture of health. Ganondorf had taught her how to channel her powers to recover from any flesh wound almost immediately, and she had put those skills to work at once. She dressed in a simple brown shirt and wraparound tan skirt. To many people, it wouldn't have seemed like much. But she loved the feeling of being clean.

What she didn't know, however, was why Ganondorf had put up the temple. This bothered her a little. Six other massive temples were all quite well, they each had demonic bosses, and they each had a Sage to keep. It should have been more than enough to keep the Hero of Time at bay. But in this Memory Temple " she would be the boss. She may have had magical powers, but they were surely nothing to boast about " what could be so important about her?

"Will you hurry up with the Temple?" Ganondorf yelled, somewhere inside the castle. With anyone else, it would have been hard to hear. "It is a matter of weeks!"

"Yes, Father," she said. Then, in a stupid impulse, she decided to ask him her question.

"What do you mean why I put up the Temple?" Ganondorf barked. "The more temples the merrier. Now shut up! I'm busy!"

She shrugged. He was always like that. But he wasn't extraordinarily cruel. He had explained it to her calmly. What was life for, if not to seek all the power you could? Any way you can? What else would there be if not for the pursuit of power? He had to destroy Hyrule. How else could he have gotten what he had gained?

She always felt uneasy when she felt him preach this philosophy, as if he was speaking blasphemy. It made her mind seem a little more eager to give her her memories back, as if there was something in there that would prove to be opposite.

She held her chin in her hands, wondering what enemies to put in it. The peach-and-pink temple was a beauty. It was relatively small, and had the same design as the illusionary Ganondorf's Castle. There was one central room, and from it branched five other rooms. Each room had a memory theme to it, and once he stepped into the room, magic would begin to work on him. His mind would be forced to bring up a memory of something tied to the room's theme. Then, when the memory subsided, he had to think it over. If he said the right thing, if he drew the right "moral" from the memory, a small key would appear for the next room. On the pedestal in the central room, one-fifth of the boss key would appear. If he completed all five rooms, the pieces of the key would connect, and he could use that to enter the room where

she would be waiting. And if he didn't catch the moral â€" he would simply stay in the room. Starve to death or something.

"It doesn't need any enemies," she murmured. "My Temple is fine the way it is." A helplessly wicked grin flashed across her face. "It'll be a challenge for that Hero to pass _my_ memory games."

Because that was what she had built into her rooms. A series of memories. The other temples were well versed in physical combat. But here that Hero would have really use his mind. He would have to come away with something from each room. The room wouldn't reveal its small key unless he said the right words, the words the memory was to trigger. It was perfect. _A pity it won't work on me,_ she thought sadly. _Any memory, I'd be happy with._ But spells did not work on their maker.

And her temple was fine the way it was.

Chapter 5

She swung her legs, her arms resting on the armchair of her small throne. It was her boss room. She loved it. _It should be something more than just a room for a fight_, she thought, looking at the shell-colored walls fondly. The whole Temple was full of fragile, simple, shining beauty. She had an eye for those kinds of things.

—

Maybe the Hero of Time would appreciate it, she thought. _Hero of Time. Interesting title. I bet he's not all that bad. He's certainly been breezing through the temples. Ganondorf â€" Father, he orders me to call him â€" he calls himself the King of Thieves or the Evil King or something like that. He says it's to make an impression. I wonder how much more of an impression he wants to make? He's terrifying already._

--

She got up from the carved throne and bent down to look into a crystal ball. She had bewitched it to show her the Hero of Time. Time after time, she marveled at his cleverness.

Forest Temple â€" cleared. Fire Temple â€" cleared. Water Temple â€" cleared. Shadow Temple â€" cleared. Spirit Temple â€" cleared. He worked the magic given to him by Great Fairies, and used his sword for the rest. There were some rooms with puzzles in them, but she rolled her eyes at them. They were obnoxiously simple. _Ganon â€" Father has really underestimated this Hero. Not at all bad._ She found herself rooting for him sometimes, especially in the Shadow Temple. She would never have admitted it, but that place made her shudder.

—

Just because I â€" just sometimes â€" want him to â€" win, it doesn't really mean that I'm on his side, she thought to calm herself. She was no traitor and she would never be one. _It's more like I'm an enemy appreciative of my foe's great skills._

--

And as she watched him swirl his way through the temples, she had to admire him more and more. Strangely enough, her admiration felt like dÃ©jÃ vu.

Then came the time she had been waiting for. He had just finished the illusion of Ganondorf's Castle. The illusion fell away, revealing her own quaint Memory Temple. She eagerly linked herself to the Hero's mind. She would be an eavesdropper, silent in his head. She knew he wouldn't â€" couldn't â€" notice her.

"What?" Link cried out in dismay. He was standing in front of a small, rosy-colored temple. It seemed to shimmer and wave, though it was made out of marble.

He groaned. "I don't believe it," he muttered. "An illusion. That whole castle was an illusion. Why didn't the Lens of Truth pick that up?"

Away in the boss room, she smiled. Her powers were far more advanced than a dinky magnifying glass.

He straightened up and regarded the temple. "At least I've learned my lesson about illusions â€" they look real. And if this is so, then I should really be shaking in fear." He looked up at the cloudy, murky sky, reminding himself once again why he was doing this. "For Hyrule," he sighed, and pushed the doors open.

He stepped into the central room, and it was immediately clear what to do. "Oh, I see. A pedestal in the middle, and five doors branching off from it, one door with no lock, and the rest with locks," Link quickly analyzed.

—

No, for real? she teased. Of course, he wouldn't hear her. But he would feel disquieted, uneasy at the very least. It showed.

~Link,~ his fairy whispered. ~There's something wrong in this temple. Something very wrong. It's not like the other temples. It scares me, Link!~

Link looked worried. "Try not to worry about it, Navi," he reassured the soft blue fay. He bit his lip. "But I think you're right. Just now, I felt strange. Likeâ€|I don't know, justâ€|unh, I can't describe it."

The fairy bobbed. "I can't describe it" was the most common description of magic. ~Let's go, Link, through the first door.~

—

Hmm, Link, so that's your name, young Hero? she mused. _I know I've heard that somewhere beforeâ€|humâ€|oh well. Go on, to my first room!_

--

The first room was hung with gauzy blue ornaments on the walls. A sign carved into the wall read "Memory of Sacrifice."

"I feel like I've walked into someone's house," Link whispered to Navi. It was that kind of place. "It doesn't feel like a temple. The person who built it must have put a lot of love into it."

At those words, the door creaked shut. She had a gift for the dramatic.

Link staggered backwards suddenly, clutching his head. She laughed softly, delighted " the room was beginning to work its magic.

~Link! Link, I can't stay in here!~ Navi was flying around wildly, being thrown " perhaps throwing herself? " into the walls. ~Link, I'll come back when you're done with this temple " I can't do it!!
" Link!~

"Go!" Link cried as if hurt. He was sweating. What was happening? He was dissolving into a dream|

--

:::::The woman ran. She couldn't possibly make it, she knew. She would die. Crying, she clutched the bundle she was holding tightly and ran.

She looked back, her vision blurred by her tears. Her home was being devoured by flames|She had to run! Or she would be caught in them.

Where can I go? she thought wildly. Her heart was beginning to palpitate quicker and quicker. Her legs would give out soon, and she'd die without giving her child a home.

Kokiri! It's the safest place in all of Hyrule! Her weakened legs pumped, pushing past thorns and bushes. The baby in her arms started crying, infected by his mother's fear.

She gasped for air and choked on smoke, running as quickly as she could. Oh God, will I make it? she thought. I have to make it!

She looked down at the baby in her arms, her baby. Her sweet Link. The look in his terrified baby eyes gave her legs the strength she needed to run the last few miles.

Finally, she reached the glade of the Great Deku Tree. She fell to her knees. "Great Deku Tree," she gasped, her throat burning. She could see dancing spots before her eyes. "Please!" She held out the child and lay him, exhausted but gently, on the damp grass.

"He is a child of destiny," the great guardian of the forest murmured. "Like one other, in the castle."

Her heart felt like it would rip in two. "Please! Raise him for me, here! Keep him safe!" she cried out.

"I will," the Deku Tree rumbled. "Have no fear, beloved daughter."

"I'm sorry, Link, I'm sorry," she whispered, sprawled on the forest floor. She couldn't get up. With the last of her strength, she touched the fair child's face. Then her strength ceased.

"Poor child," the tree said softly. And even he didn't know to whom he referred.::::

—

"What kind of blasted temple is this?!" Link cried. The room was spinning. "It's impossible, impossible! Oh God, Mom!" His voice was strangled with emotion.

—

Did you like that? she thought, her eyes flashing with sudden, gleeful hate. It took her almost by surprise. _Did you like seeing that memory? Then maybe you'll like the others in my beautiful rooms! Do you think you can pass this temple as easily as you did the others? No! This is the Temple of Memory " and memory you shall have! You'll drown in your memories!_ She felt tears in her eyes, hot angry tears. _Drown in the memories I can't have!_

— —

Link held his head. "Mom," he said. The wild grief he had felt was fading away to a sort of ache. He looked almost thoughtful. "Would you be proud of me, Mom? I hope you are. I know you're out there, somewhere. _I've never known you but I love you " and I can't change the past_, " he realized.

At these words, a spot in the center of the room shimmered. The first small key clattered on the floor. The door that had locked him in swung open, revealing one-fifth of the boss key swirling on the pedestal.

Chapter 6

—

_"So," Link said, sounding as grim as he felt. He watched the small fraction of the boss key swirling around on the pedestal. "Four more rooms. Full of"of _that_. I can't wait to meet the boss," he said sarcastically. "A little piece of heaven, I'm sure."

(You have to forgive Link his mood. Fighting through six temples and one castle, discovering that the castle's a fake, having to do another temple, reliving your mother's dying moments, and realizing that you'll have to relive the worst moments in your life is bound to make anyone moody.)

He looked around at the doors he had to choose from. Four left, and none of them had very promising names. They were Memory of Humiliation, Memory of Fear, Memory of Duty, and probably worst of all, Memory of Love. _But I don't love anyone,_ Link thought defensively. _I haven't had nearly enough time for that. _Maybe that room would have him eavesdropping in Ruto's mind. Link smiled at the

thought, then focused on Memory of Humiliation.

"I am so not looking forward to this," Link said under his breath. He went in anyway.

The room had the same kind of style as the first one. It was hung with the same kinds of ornaments, but had a different color scheme â€" gray. Soft, pearly gray, if you can understand what I mean.

The door swung abruptly shut behind him, startling Link. A powdery substance filled the room, filtering in from some unknown location. Link felt his eyelids droppingâ€|

—

:::::I looked down, sitting quietly on the porch of my house. It was a beautiful day. In Kokiri, all days were beautiful. Kokiri was a mystical wood, the kind where the sun breaks through the trees with swirling dust-laden bars of light.

My eyes flitted to the exit out of Kokiri. I had read the sign over and over. No Kokiris were allowed to leave the forest. I was so curious. What, exactly, was outside there? What was so dangerous about the outside that no Kokiris could leave? I mean, surely, if I wanted to go, I could. One step into Hyrule Field wouldn't hurt me.

I climbed down the ladder and stood, watching. There was a game going on. It looked like fun. Fado, a bright-eyed Kokiri girl, was turning cartwheels in the middle of a circle. Everyone was there, accompanied by their fairies.

I wished shyly that I could join. I may have been boisterous about leaving Kokiri, but I guess I wasn't a people person. Or maybe it was just Mido.

Mido. He hated me, and I didn't know why. Just because I had no fairy? What kind of a reason was that? And everyone looked like they were having such fun out there. But of course, I was alone. The odd one out.

He had no reason to hate me, to keep me from making friends. I hated him right back. Look at him, marching so smugly with his fairy tagging by his side. I'd bet anyone a million Rupees that the fairy was cause for his inflated ego. I imagined what he would look like if his ego were visible. He would probably fall over on his side, unbalanced.

There he was. It was his turn at the game everyone was playing. He cast Saria a proud look before he began, but Saria looked away. He turned the most magnificent cartwheels I had ever seen, not that I would ever admit that to him. Then, one huge one and he landed practically in Saria's lap.

—

I hated that. I hated that a lot. I hated Mido with all of my child heart. He was the reason everyone ostracized me. Only Saria

would stop, every once in a while, to say hi. But we were all too small, and we needed a leader. I could have been that leader. But there was no fairy spinning 'round my shoulder, as Mido was so quick to remind everyone._

--

In the boss room, she leaned forward. These were some interesting memories she was pulling up. Imagine the noble Hero of Time as a loner, an outsider, the village idiot.

-

Saria pushed Mido away as carefully as she could without hurting him. Sariaâ€|Saria was different from Fado, and other Kokiri girls. A little more reserved. Maybe a little kinder. I wasn't sure. I never really had a chance to talk to her. Mido put her shadow out of business.

Another Kokiri stepped up to do some tricks in the center of the ring. I wanted to try. I knew Mido would just humiliate me. But I could try.

Saria looked away from the game for a moment, and crossed eyes with mine. I had been drawing closer to the game, not even realizing it! She smiled a small, timid smile, but it was genuine. She mouthed the words "Come play, Link!"

That was enough for me. I ran in and sat down in the circle. Soon it would be my turn, since not everyone had gone yet. As long as I could play, I didn't heavily mind being last.

"Oh, ho! Who's this?" Mido's nasal voice reached my ears. I was certain that in any other part of Hyrule, he would be thrown into a dungeon or something just for being Mido. That was certainly enough for me.

"You know my name well enough, Mido, it's all you ever say," I snapped.

"What are you doing in here? You know you're not welcome in any of the Kokiri games."

For a moment, I looked at Saria. She gave a reassuring smile. Mido looked in the direction I had.

"Boy without a fairy wants Saria, I see? Tough luck. She's mine."

"You can't just claim a person. That's stupid. And I have a right to play, just as much right to play as you do."

"If you were Kokiri, I'd let you play, just out of the goodness of my heart," Mido drawled. "But you're not! Not even a fairy!"

I stood up. "What is it with you and the stupid fairy fixation?" I sneered. "So I don't have some dumb ball of light feeding me ego food every half second. And? How does that interfere with me being able to play?"

Mido fluttered his eyelids. "Oh Link, you talk so purty," he said in a falsetto tone. Then he returned to his regular voice. "Link. What a stupid name. No Kokiri has a name like Link."

The other Kokiris were shifting, fidgety, restless. I guess I couldn't blame them. No Kokiri likes a fight. They're an essentially peaceful people. Except for that blasted Mido.

"Come here, Mido," I challenged him. I hopped agilely to a large, mostly even grass platform in the middle of some water right before the Deku Tree's glade. "Why don't you come here? You win, I'll go to my home. I win, I get to play."

Mido grinned. He probably thought it was too easy, that I'd be a pushover. "You're on."

I looked to the other Kokiri kids for a minute. It was a minute too long. I should have known I'd find no reassurance in their faces. They were Mido's pawns. I wouldn't be surprised if he paid some of them money.

Caught unaware, Mido pushed me into the water. One Kokiri laughed, probably not able to help it. I must have looked hilarious as I toppled into the water.

Hilarious.

I climbed out. I guess laughter really is contagious. All of the Kokiris were laughing. I knew Saria must have wanted to laugh, too. But she didn't. I didn't think I could stand it if she laughed.

There were tears in my eyes, and they ran down my face, mixing with the water already there.

"Well, looky here! Not only does he not know his place, he's a total pushover, and he's a crybaby!" Mido crowed.

I was not crying tears of weakness. I was crying tears of bitterness. I was not made to be laughed at like a freak show. Like I was some freak. I was not a freak.

It was horrible. Horrible. Everyone was laughing. They were cawing. They were hooting. They were rolling around on the grass belly laughing. And Mido crowing loudest of all. I could hear his delighted laugh. His laugh at my expense.

The worst thing was Saria. She wasn't laughing at all. She was giving stern looks to the laughing Kokiris. But I could see. She held her face stern, but her stomach was shaking. She wrapped an arm around it to try to hold it in, and I could see the spark of laughter in her eyes. She looked at me, and there was pity in her eyes.

—

_No, _that_ was the worst thing of all. Pity. Laughter. Couldn't they see I was a creature of pride? Couldn't they see?_

—

I ran into my treehouse and cried myself to sleep, utterly humiliated. Mido must have been happy. I didn't show my face for what must have been weeks, though I was too humiliated to keep track of the time. Every time I recalled the incident my face would burn and the angry tears would spring up.

I left the treehouse only when I had a fairy in tow.:.:.:.:

—

Link stood up. Even now, seven or eight years after the episode, he felt angry. Link had never, ever been a person to laugh at.

—

I know how you feel, she whispered into his mind. He shook his head, trying to free himself of the memory.

"This temple is horrible. It's bringing back everything I'd like to forget," he said bitterly.

The mood of the memory was still there, and his face was flushed. He couldn't stand it, couldn't, couldn't, simply couldn't! His pride was one of the things he could never give up. Not in exchange for anything in the world.

—

What am I supposed to do now? he thought. He felt a little relief. That memory was over.

No it wasn't. It was replaying in his head. How he had run away, crying. How he hadn't come out. He had let Mido get to him, let Mido get what he wanted. He had had all of Kokiri laughing at his expense, and none of them cared about him. Him the individual, the loner. None of them cared.

"Yeah, actually someone did care," Link remembered. "Saria may have been laughing inside, but she held it in. She tried to help my feelings, she knew I had been humiliated. She maybe didn't handle it the right way, _but at least someone cared enough to try._"

A spot in the middle of the room shone with gray light. When the light subsided, a small key was left. And in the center room, another piece of the boss key materialized.

Chapter 7

Link was tired. Emotionally. Physically, although the rooms hadn't required him to do much. But they were draining. Living through painful experiences. It hurt, a lot, as much as if he had been transported back in time and forced to do the same things again, knowing that he couldn't change anything.

"Sacrifice? Check. Humiliation? Check. Now all I have left to do is duty, fear, and love. Perfect. I can't wait to be in love, sounds like the easiest memory yet." But his instincts warned Link to stay away from that room, and Link had learned to trust his instincts a long, long time ago. So he entered the "Memory of Fear" room.

The room was decorated in pastel yellow, identical to the last two except for the color. _Someone here has a fabulous sense of color_, he couldn't help but think, sounding for all the world like an interior decorator. _I don't think Ganondorf built this temple, though I've never heard of a temple devoted to memory before._

--

Thanks, she said in his mind. She was enjoying what she was learning about the Hero's life. His feelings. Fascinating, and they would be rather useful in the boss fight. _I rather like the decoration, don't you think? But I don't know if you'll much enjoy the memories, hah hah._

--

Link raked his hand through his hair, upsetting his hood. Now he was hearing voices. _I wonder if there's ever been a mentally deranged Hero of Time before?_ The thought struck him as funny, somehow, and he chuckled.

Then he collapsed abruptly, and his head fell on his chest as he nodded back into time.

--

:::::The girl besides me ducked her head as we stepped out of the pit. "I hate the sun," she complained, as she had done a million times before.

I wasn't paying much attention. The sky wasâ€|strange. I had never seen the sky above Hyrule Field look so clouded. The pure blue was rapidly disappearing, being swallowed up by large dark thunderclouds. "Don't say that," I said, distanced. "If you'll look up, the sun isâ€|well, disappearing."

"What?" She gasped and looked up, shocked. I watched her reaction. She was watching some especially dark clouds rolling right on top of the sun. "Wait, this isn't good."

--

_I was scared. I had seen thunderstorms before, of course, but not like this. Not with that distinct feeling of something being nervous and unsettled. "I know it's not good," I replied, a little slowly. This strange feeling fazed my mind. It was like back in Kokiri, those strange nightmares I always had. "The Hylian sky is always, _always_ blue."_

--

What had the Great Deku Tree said? Something about my slumber being restless and full of nightmares, for those "sensitive to the climate of evil pervading the land". The nightmares had scared me enough. Now it looked like they were about to turn into reality. And who really wants their nightmares to become reality? Nightmares belonged safely tucked away in your mind's recesses. Not rushing up into in-your-face real life.

She didn't reply. I guessed that maybe the whole experience was a little weird to her, too. After all, she had lived in a pit for most of her life. Or so she told me, and there was little evidence to disprove her. I didn't especially want to disprove her, either.

Raindrops were falling now. Fat globs of water that thudded onto your head and bare arms and in her case, bare feet. She flinched at their touch, as if each raindrop was a bomb dropped.

"I'm soaked," I said unnecessarily. Maybe I was just trying to deviate that fear from my mind. Fear that my nightmares were becoming reality, the nightmares I had been running from, the nightmares that Zelda and I shared. Zelda was scared, too. I could feel it. And even if I couldn't have felt it, I would have known. She had been scared even when we met in her castle's courtyard. I had been too thick-headed at the time to take it in, to process that fear, its significance â€" Zelda was a prophetess. And if she was scared of what she knew was the future, then I should have been shaking and hiding in a hole.

"No, really, Link? I'm dry as a little bunny in a warm underground burrow," she said sarcastically. It was a rather harsh characteristic of hers.

I could hear Hyrule Market's drawbridge creaking open in a hurry, though I couldn't see it very well because of the blinding rain that offset it. I almost knew who was going to rush away from there. But it wasn't that I really knew, that I had seen the future. It was that my mortally terrified mind had recalled my nightmares into vision and, fed on adrenaline, had zipped the pieces together.

It was Zelda and Impa, racing away together on her white horse! I remember Zelda had named the horse Hyrule. She had named it that, she told me, so that even when Hyrule's downfall came, she would have Hyrule with her. A typical Zelda thing to do.

She looked at me with wide-open, terrified eyes. I stepped forward slightly, like she seemed to want me to do. It was my nightmare, happening all over again, happening so quickly!

She threw a blue object. It flew, as smoothly as you please, right into the black moat.

My heart almost stopped. She had just thrown the Ocarina of Time! If Ganondorf got his hands on that, there'd be no stopping him. He'd kill me, take away the Spiritual Stonesâ€"but he still wouldn't have the Song of Time. I knew Zelda would only give it to me.

I couldn't help but sneak a glance at the girl by my side. How little I truly knew about her. For all I knew, she could be in direct conspiracy with Ganondorf. She had a Gerudo look about her. But I trusted her completely, for more reasons than one, and I wouldn't judge her on appearance.

I knew who the next rider was. It was the scene from my nightmare. The nightmare that had woken me up with my own screaming countless of times.

"Listen," I whispered to her. "You need to run. Now. I think I know who's coming â€" now hide! You don't want to see him!"

She nodded, wide-eyed with everything going on around her. I gave her a quick push, just enough to get her moving, and she ducked behind a boulder.

Then there he was. Lightning illuminated him and his horse, which was the only reason I could see him. That, and his bright red hair stood out like a Zora in Goron City. His face was so twisted with evil and greed, with hatred and wanting. My heart was pounding faster than it ever had before, faster than if a thousand Barinades had combined to give me an electric shock. It was pounding from a combination of fear and hate.

His black horse reared and neighed, shattering the sky with the eerily high-pitched sound. I stood stock still, frozen like a fool in front of the most evil thing in Hyrule.

"Hey, kid," he bellowed from atop his horse. "Did you see a white horse go past?"

I didn't answer. I told myself that I wouldn't, but I knew inside that my jaw was locked in helpless fear and that even if I did talk, it would be in a trembling whisper. I couldn't display my weakness like that, I had to put on a show. My eyes locked onto him. It was like I was running towards my fear and maybe even my death.

I did the stupidest, most instinctive, reflexive thing I have ever done. I whipped out my sword and shield and crouched, scared to death but prepared for a fight. I should have known better.

Ganondorf merely chuckled. "I like your attitude, kid," he laughed. Loudly. At me. Then he proceeded to show off his powers. He gathered black light and jettisoned it out at me. It knocked me on my butt as if I had been a feather.

Ganondorf ran off on his horse, pursuing Zelda and Impa. I prayed silently for him to never come back, and for Zelda, Impa and Hyrule to reach someplace safe where he couldn't reach them. I stayed on the ground. The fear had crept all over me like an aftershock. It reached into my joints and paralyzed me. I had gotten just one taste of him. But I knew I would meet him again, and by then, I would be ready and fearless.

I hoped.:::::

—

In the boss room, she had gone rigid. This memory was different from the others, somehowâ€|She could almost remember something nowâ€|

Link groaned and rubbed his head. The memory lingered for a long time. He could taste the fear in his mouth. He had been so terrified at the sight of Ganondorf, terrified for Zelda, terrified for himself, there had barely been room for other emotion. To him, everything had been in slow motion.

For a fleeting moment, he wondered what had happened to the girl. The

thought of what might have happened to her made something in him stir. But he couldn't quite remember who she was. He didn't know if it was some effect of the temple or if he honestly forgot, but there was a repressed blank area right around where she should come in.

"What am I supposed to draw from this?" Link said out loud. "I _know_ I was scared within an inch of my life. And?"

He mulled over it. Link had always been excellent in covering fear up. Now that he was faced with it again, he was having a hard time.

"I was scared, yes," Link told the unfeeling yellow wall. "I was scared I couldn't handle Ganondorf. _But I tried, at least._"

When the yellow light in the center of the room faded, a small key remained. And the third piece of the boss key joined its two brothers in the central room's pedestal.

Chapter 8

Link read the carving over the second to last door. "Memory of Duty," he read. He looked around for a moment, expecting to see Navi with him. Then he remembered that she couldn't take the temple and sighed. He couldn't help but feel a bit resentful about that.

"A Memory of Duty," Link read again. "All my life's been a big basket of duty. Not that I'm complaining. It was either that or stay in Kokiri, a place I knew wasn't my home."

His eyes flitted to the next door. Memory of Love. He was almost dying with curiosity. He wanted to see what memory would be dug up that would fit such criteria. _The closest I've ever come to love,_ he thought to himself, _is either Zelda or Saria. And they were really close friends. I was not in "love" with either of them._

But he had already used his small key to open "Memory of Duty". He shrugged and walked in.

This room's color scheme was pink, which surprised him. He thought Memory of Love would be decorated in pink.

—

Oh please, she said, still aware of Link's every thought. _Give me some creative credit. Love is a much more somber thing than "pink"._

--

Link shook his head slightly. He felt like there was something wrong in his head. It wasn't just her in the boss room, either. The closer he got to Memory of Love, he felt like there was a piece of his mind that was being mysteriously flattened. Blanked out until he reached that room. It was creepy, as if his mind was crumbly.

"I wouldn't be surprised if I'm senile before 25. This temple has more tricks than a barrel of Hylian merchants," Link said. He touched the pink hanging on the wall. The room's effect, strangely enough,

was of being inside a cloud. It was somewhat pleasant â€

Until the door shut behind him, and an unseen force pushed him into the far wall, knocking the wind out of him. Quickly enough, the memory surfaced.

—

:::::I crept into the castle courtyard, my heart fluttering nervously. Those two laughing fellows in Hyrule Market Town had given me the idea to come here. They had practically outlined an entrance plan there for anyone to listen. And when one of them mentioned that the drainpipe was too small for him, my heart almost stopped.

Because if the drainpipe was too small for him, it would be just right for me.

I told no one of my plans, of course. Who would I tell? And for what purpose? Besides, I didn't like telling people what I was doing. Maybe I was just naturally paranoid, after my adventure with the Deku Tree.

I could see the princess right in front of me. Her back was to me, because she was looking into the window in front of her.

It was too late for me to feel nervous or stupid. I had done the deed. Now I had come here to speak to Princess Zelda. So I would.

I walked up to her and tapped her on the back.

She whirled around. "Who?! Who are you?" she gasped. "How did you get past the guards?"

She was beautiful, I guess, though I didn't pay attention to those kinds of things. Beautiful, in the sense that she had such deep, perfect blue eyes and hair the color of a golden sunset. However, that really wasn't what I was concerned with now. I wasn't even sure why I had gone in here. It was my custom to do things and ask questions later, though that custom often left me with a very tangible feeling of stupidity.

—

_I just looked at her shyly, unsure of what to say. What _does_ one say to a princess? How would you talk to one?_

—

Her eyes looked behind me, to where Navi was fluttering in the air. "Oh? What's that? Is thatâ€|a fairy?!"

I nodded slightly. She stared at me like I was her last hope. "Then are youâ€|are you from the forest?"

Again the imbecile nod. I wasn't sure what to say. But Zelda quite took over. "Thenâ€|thenâ€|you wouldn't happen to have the Spiritual Stone of the Forest, would you?" she asked shyly. "That green and

shining stoneâ€|"

Zelda was just as timid as I was! Okay, granted, I was bold where and when I had to be. But I had had to work on that. I was shy with strangers by nature.

"Iâ€|Yes, I have the Stone," I said. She had been looking at me so hopefully. I'd feel horrible forever if I lied to her. Besides, surely this dainty princess wouldn't betray me.

She looked as if a prophecy had come true before her eyes. "Just as I thought," she breathed. "I had a dreamâ€|In the dream, dark storm clouds were billowing over the land of Hyruleâ€|But suddenly a ray of light shot out of the forest, parted the clouds and lit up the groundâ€|The light turned into a figure holding a green and shining stone, followed by a fairy."

"So, you think that figure is me?" I said skeptically. "Princess, why would I be in your dreams?"

Her eyes bored into me. "I know this is a prophecy that someone would come from the forest. Yes, I thought you might be the one." She seemed lost in thought.

"Princess?" I asked gently.

She looked surprised. "Oh, I'm sorry! I got carried away with my story and I didn't even properly introduce myself!"

"That's okay, I know who you are â€" " I began to say.

"I'm Zelda, Princess of Hyrule." She tilted her head to the side. "What is your name?"

I sighed. "Link."

Zelda looked thoughtful again. She would look weird if she didn't look thoughtful. "Linkâ€|strangeâ€|it sounds somehowâ€|familiar." Again that lost look. But this time she caught herself and clapped. "Okay then Linkâ€|I'm going to tell you the secret of the Sacred Realm that has been passed down by the Royal Family of Hyrule. Please keep this a secret from everyone?"

Wait. Why did she want me to keep it a secret from everyone? I only came here because the Deku Tree asked me to. It wasn't like I was actually going to continue this mad quest.

Was I?

I nodded, being drawn into something I couldn't help.

So she told me the legend of the Triforce and the real purpose of the Temple of Time. "In order to open the door, you need three Spiritual Stones. You already have one of them. And another thing you need is the treasure the Royal Family keeps along with this legendâ€|The Ocarina of Time!"

"I'm sure," I said politely. "But, um, Zelda? Why are you telling me this? I mean, I'm not really going toâ€|"

But she wasn't paying attention. She was looking through the window and beckoned to me. With a sigh, I stepped forward. "I forgot to tell you," Zelda said, "that I was spying through the window just now. The other element from my dreams â€" the dark clouds â€" I believe they symbolize that man in there! Will you look through the window at him?"

> Every word the Princess said made me feel more and more guilty. Guilty for not liking where the Princess was going with all that. I knew that eventually Zelda would ask me to get her those three Spiritual Stones. <p>

Still, I looked through the window. A very tall, red-haired man strode forward and knelt. Zelda explained that this was Ganondorf, leader of the Gerudos, and her feelings that his allegiance to her father was not sincere.

Ganondorf turned towards us and I instinctively turned my face.

"Oh, what happened?" she asked. "Did he see you? Oh, well, don't worry." She giggled. "He doesn't have any idea what we're planningâ€|yet!" Then the happy, child-like look faded away to a look of worry and concern. "My father doesn't believe my dream. But I can sense that man's evil intentions!"

Her moods were so open, unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I must have looked sympathetic, because that was how I felt.

"Link, he must be after the Triforce! Now we are the only ones who can protect Hyrule." She clasped her hands together and pleaded, "Please?"

I knew what was coming, I knew it! She wanted me to get her the stones!

I was a fool. "I'll get the Stones," I promised her, though I immediately wanted to take those words back. I wasn't an adventurer, one of those stupid treasure-seekers. I could apologize to the Princess right now, and tell her that I wasn't her man. I could go right back to Kokiriâ€|

—

_And then what? More teasing at my expense? More of the insufferable Mido? More wondering what _might have _happened? Could I really do that?_

—

"Link, I will protect the Ocarina of Time with all of my power! He shall not have it! You go find the other two Spiritual Stones! Let's get the Triforce before Ganondorf does, and then defeat him!"

She scribbled something on a fancy-looking piece of paper. "One more thing, Link, take this letter â€" I'm sure it'll be helpful to you somehow."

This time, I looked at her pleadingly. I couldn't take on this adventure. I couldn't. I didn't know what had made me open my mouth and make such a rash promise. I was Kokiri, after all, wasn't I?

But I knew the answer to that. No, I wasn't. Kokiris would die if they left the forest. And here I was in Zelda's courtyard, breathing and healthy, except for that scratch I got battling that dumb Stalchild.

I couldn't possibly do it, couldn't possibly!

An imposing woman was standing outside from where I had come in. "Everything is exactly as the Princess foretold," she assured me, in a rich, warm voice. Her voice took on softened notes at her next words. "You're a courageous boyâ€|you're heading out on a big new adventure, aren't you?"

Her voice was like the mother I never had. For a moment I wanted to run crying into her lap for comfort, and had to physically restrain myself from doing so.

She taught me Zelda's Lullaby, a tune she swore had mysterious power. Then we were outside of the castle, looking at Hyrule Field.

She sighed blissfully. "You brave ladâ€|we must protect this beautiful land of Hyrule! The princess is waiting for you to return to the castle with the Stones. All of us are counting on you!"

"Wait!" I cried desperately. She turned back. "What is it, dear boy?"

"I can't do it. I just can't."

She must have caught the note of misery in my voice. She bent down to my height and put a hand on my shoulder. It was a reassuring touch. "We all must do things we don't want to do sometimes," she said softly. "It's a thing called duty. You're the only one who can get these Spiritual Stones. You're the one from the Princess's dream. It is your duty to try to get the Stones."

I shook my head. "You don't understandâ€|I mean, I don't want to disappoint Princess Zelda or you or anybody, but I really can't. I don't know what to do or where to go. I honestly can't do it. Zelda swept me along in the moment, but now I really realize that I can't!"

—

— "No, no, no, Link," she said sternly. "If you keep on saying that you can't, you won't. And we know that you can â€" and will â€" do it. You are the only one that can. And because of that, you have an obligation to do it. If you run back to Kokiri â€" well, a Shiekah should not reveal these things, but in a few years you would find yourself grown and Kokiri a pit of monsters. And those conditions would never change, because one little boy decided he wouldn't do it. You would be an accomplice in the murder of Hyrule. It's really your choice, young lad, whether you want to do it or not. But all of Hyrule hopes that you do do it. And no more discussion about it. You can go up Death Mountain or you can run to Kokiri and turn your back on the world." Finished with her speech, she disappeared with a flash. _

—
I knew she was right. I had to do it. Even if I didn't want to. Even if I didn't think I could. I had to at least try. For Hyrule's sake.::::

—
Link rose with a sigh. "At least that wasn't such a bad memory," he mumbled, his eyes wanting to stay closed and his body wanting to stay curled on the floor. "It seems like the boss of the Temple decided to give me a break."

She snorted. "Why would I give you a break?" she said into her crystal ball, looking at the young man. She was beginning to feel a desperate uneasiness, like something inside of her was horribly wrong. Her head was beginning to hurt. It wasn't even a migraine. It was like a volcano was about to erupt in her head.

Link bit his lip. "Let's see—what can I get out of this experience? Oh jeez, this has to be my favorite room. The answer's easy —sometimes we have to do what we feel we cannot in order to prove that we can_."

Link grinned as the last small key appeared, and the fourth piece of the boss key could be heard colliding with its brothers. Just one more room left to go.

Chapter 9

The room that had made him so nervous. Memory of Love. He could joke about it to himself, but the thought of reliving—love—made him, well, embarrassed.

His head was starting to hurt badly. It was not even a migraine —it was like there was a volcano about to erupt in his head.

He quickly unlocked the Memory of Love room. It was hung with a surprising choice of black.

"Love is not a happy thing," she said quietly, registering the look of shock on the Hero's face. "Many times, it's really rather tragic."

At least the Memory of Love room had a rather nice way of putting him to sleep. Fairy powder was sprinkled from the ceiling, and he was out instantly.

—
:::~I limped out of Zora's Domain, tired beyond belief. It was past the capacity of anyone to feel so tired. My leg hurt. It jarred violently with every step I took. And something weird was going on in my chest. Even a single breath made my ribs rattle.

I knew what was going on. My leg was broken, and a rib must have been broken, too.

Night broke [no pun intended], and I was left to fend for myself. Hyrule Market was closed for the night. I wished that just once they would ease off the rule. I hurt so, so badly. I needed a Potions Master. I had enough Rupees to pay for one.

I touched my hand to my forehead. It was burning. But that couldn't be possible " I was shivering with cold. My hand came away wet.

I limped on mindlessly, far away from the Market, to some armpit of the Field. There I finally collapsed. The moon looked on from its cold position in the sky. I watched it move for what seemed like forever. I touched the evil bruise on my ribs lightly. That must have been where the bone was broken. I could swear that I felt the bone breaking through the skin of my stomach.

I fell into a restless, uneasy sleep. I was woken by the sound of footsteps near me. The footsteps were actually very light, but I wasn't in the deepest of slumbers. I couldn't force my eyes to open, so I hoped that whoever it was would go away and leave me in peace. I guess it wasn't to be so. I felt a poke, and a drop of something wet fell on me. A tear. Who would be crying over me?

Someone was lifting me up " carrying me somewhere. Someone was"they were"they"

I didn't care. I couldn't take it. The person held me lightly, but the pain of movement was just too much. My consciousness slipped away from me.

I woke to a cold feeling on my eyes that seemed to force them open. I saw a pair of yellow eyes, looking curiously down at me. Ganondorf?!

"Ganondorf," I whispered. I had to suppress the urge to laugh. Ganondorf was coming to kill me, to take away my Stones"I had known this would happen someday, Ganondorf was going to k-i-l-l me"

The voice that spoke, though, was not Ganondorf's. It was a girl. "I'm not Ganondorf," the girl said. She sounded almost afraid. Afraid? Of what? "I found you," she said, "and I brought you here to heal you."

She was going to heal me. She had to be alright if she was going to heal me. I wanted to say thank you, but the effect of the blue salve was wearing off. My eyes were dropping.

The girl put a cool hand on my forehead. It felt wonderful. I was hot and burning. The cool hand made me shiver. I couldn't help it.

Then the blue salve's effect diminished, and I slid back into unconsciousness. The last thing I heard her say in her tinkling voice was "Poor boy."

I wasn't a poor boy. She could look in my purse if she wanted to.

Every once in a while, when some semblance of consciousness returned to me, I could hear her voice. I began to search for it within my dreamless sleep. It gave me proof that I shouldn't let go. That there was something out there that I should return to, that I hadn't always

lived in that black emptiness.

The next time I woke up, it was on my own, without the aid of blue fire salve. I didn't quite open my eyes. But I asked the girl, "Who are you?"

She seemed so sad when she answered. So painfully sad. "If only I knew," she said. She stopped her talking. She had been talking about Hyrule Market.

"Please keep talking." I liked her voice. I wanted to see the owner of this voice. I opened my eyes.

"Why?" she asked in astonishment, her mouth a surprised little O.

She was beautiful. In a different way than Zelda or Malon. Her eyes were yellow and clever and full of life, though now they were also full of surprise. They hid under the longest eyelashes I have ever seen. Her nose was long and straight, and her skin was a rich dark tan. Her hair was so bright a red it made the Goron's Ruby look pink by comparison. It was very long and reached down to perhaps the floor. Granted, it was also full of filth, but the color was so pure you could overlook the filth. Now I knew what "red" really was. Her hands were callused but shapely, and her nails had been roughly chewed down to size, but in different circumstances they might have been the hands of a great lady.

I remembered that she had asked me a question and tore my eyes from her. "Your voice when I was sleeping. Gave me something to hold on to aah!" I cried suddenly. I should have known better than to try to sit up. My rib was taking advantage of my consciousness by making sure I was in as much pain as possible.

The pain, however, was like fresh air to my mind. It woke me up.

"What is it?" she asked instantly.

"My ribs," I moaned. "I moved, and my ribs"

The girl took on a business-like manner and lifted up my tunic, bringing my attention to the pathetic state it was in. Then I realized that I was dealing with a girl whose clothing wasn't in much better shape, and relaxed.

She looked lost as she saw the shape I was in. I heard her whisper something that might or might not have been a prayer. The prayer must have boosted her spirits, because she turned to me. "Listen, Link," she said. "I'll try my best to heal you, okay?"

How could she know my name? I hadn't told her it yet. But she wasn't going to hurt me, I could feel that. I nodded.

"Alright," she said, her voice taking on that brisk tone again. "First, I'm going to bind up your leg. It might hurt, but only for a little bit. I need it to heal straight."

"So do I," I said, not able to repress the remark. Then I lay back down. My ribs did have limits.

She smiled, then began looking around the pit. I familiarized myself with my new surroundings, not that there was much to them. I was lying on a bed of moss or something, slightly wet, but springy. For a pit, it was organized well. All of her healing materials were in one corner, a pitiful assortment of food was in another, and her blanket was folded neatly next to the bed. I wondered fleetingly how long she had lived here.

"What do you need?" I asked her.

I ended up giving her my last Deku Sticks, and she bound my leg. It hurt, a lot, but she wasn't a professional, so I had to hand it to her.

—

The days — or weeks, or months, I didn't care and I wasn't keeping track by then — passed quickly. It was like heaven, and she was like the other half of my soul. Somehow, she understood the things I told her. Like how humiliated Mido made me feel. Like how triumphant I felt whenever I conquered another dungeon. Like how frightened I had felt the day I realized I, alone, had to save Hyrule. Like the resentment I had felt towards Zelda, sitting tucked away neatly in her castle, while I went out and got myself killed. It wasn't that she merely understood — she listened. I grew to need her to pour myself into. —

—

The things I admired about her were so many. She had a razor-honed wit. Sometimes she could be wickedly sarcastic, or sometimes she would just be teasing gently. Her capacity for independence was startling. She had lived in this pit for most of her life, she told me, and she had made her way around.

A lot of times, I would wake up when she was sleeping. Ignoring the jolting pain in my healing ribs, I would crawl over to her and prop myself up and just stare at her for what must have been hours on end.

It grew to be almost torture. I didn't know if she felt the same way — probably not. I mean, she had seen me in my weakest, most vulnerable moments. And I didn't have the best personality around, either. It took a lot for me to shut up at the moments when I wanted to tell her just how deeply I was in love with her, how far I had fallen for her. Because I didn't have the stomach for rejection.

It sounds kind of funny, doesn't it? I mean, I had fought Queen Gohma, King Dodongo, and that Barinade anemone thing, all of which could have destroyed me if I hadn't been quick on my feet and handy with a sword. And I was afraid to say just those simple three words out loud, to her face. Granted, I would whisper them to her when she was asleep. But only when she was asleep. Not at any other time.

Case in point. The conversation of ours I remember most vividly was, actually, a conversation about love. I, of course, began it by waking her up.

"What?" she mumbled. She rolled over. I poked her shoulder, and she sighed and sat up, then peered at me. "Oh. Hello, Link," she said sleepily. She yawned. "For a moment, I forgot you were here."

"I just wanted to ask you a question," I said.

She rubbed the sleepiness out of her eyes. "Yes? I'm listening."

"Well," I began, feeling asinine, "Do you ever think aboutâ€|well, love?" I wanted to swallow my tongue at that moment. It was a good thing the pit was dark, or she might have seen my cheeks on fire.

"Good question," she said after a pause. "I used to. When I was alone, I mean. I used to always wonder what it felt like." Was it my imagination, or had she emphasized the "used to"? "And you?"

"I've thought about it. A lot. But I don't need to think about it much anymore," I dared bravely.

I couldn't see her reaction to that, but I could hear her next words. "I remember wondering who would ever love me. For crying out loud, I live in a pit. My clothes are a wreck. I'm filthy."

"If anyone would be lookist enough to judge you on that, I pity them," I said instantly. "They'd really be missing someone special if they skipped you over."

"Thanks," she said, and moved a little closer to me.

I sighed. "I don't get many chances to stop for romance. I mean, I have places to go, prophets to see, dungeons to beat and bosses to kill."

"That's so sad," she said softly.

This cocked my interest. "Why does it seem sad to you?"

"I can gather from what you've told me that you don't necessarily want it that way. But you have such a strong sense of duty, you know you have to do it anyway." There was a definite hint of admiration in there.

I didn't say anything. What could I say without sounding like an ego freak?

She lay her head on my shoulder with such ease, and she promptly fell asleep there. And for a moment, I was happy.:.:.:

—

She gaped at her crystal ball. She remembered that same day. That same conversation.

She remembered why the name "Link" had seemed familiar. She remembered why that admiration for his skill had seemed like dÃ©jÃ vu.

She remembered it all. Everything! The walk under the moon where she

had first seen him. Binding his leg and ribs. Talking to him. The way his voice always seemed to be confessing something. She let out a sob, or something like one, a cross between a laugh and a sob. She remembered the guard in Hyrule Market Town calling her weird, she remembered stealing countless items from wealthy merchants, she remembered the kind fat man in the Shooting Gallery, she remembered Herrez, she remembered it all!

So she hadn't been wrong those seven years ago, when she had suspected that Link felt something more than friendship towards her. But he had been wrong in supposing she didn't feel the exact same way.

"Oh, God, Link," she whispered. "Why didn't you tell me, so I could make sure? Linkâ€¦" She started to cry, strange tears, partly relieved, partly scared, partly worried, partly overjoyed â€" and definently, fully loving. Because now she could remember why she had felt uneasy at Ganondorf's blasphemy â€" because Link had shown her the exact opposite!

She didn't dissipate the mind link she had built. She needed to see his reaction.

Link was shocked. To put it lightly. Mostly at the fact that this love that he had just re-experienced had been stamped out of his mind the moment he stepped into the Temple.

Where had she gone? Where could she have gone? Was sheâ€¦Goddesses forbid, was she dead? He had to see her. At least once more.

Crying, the girl in the boss room opened the door for him, and gave him the boss key. Link walked out, slightly dizzy from the memory's after-effects, and from his own worry that she was gone. He could remember her now, so clearly it hurt.

"And in this condition, I have to fight a boss?" Link muttered, feeling like a thousand little people had simultaneously decided to have a circus on his heart. He was jittery, his mind was fogged by worry and regret.

He opened the door and stepped into the boss room.

Chapter 10

But what he saw was not at all what he expected.

The boss was a girl. A girl who must have been roughly his age. She was tall and had long, bright red hair that tumbled far beyond her shoulders. She wore no make-up and a simple brown outfit.

And her eyes were clever yellow.

"It can't be. You would never do this," Link gasped. "You saved my life once. You would never do this to me."

"I'm so sorry, Link," she said, her heart turning over anew at the sight of him, real, in the flesh. "Iâ€¦I wish I could say I didn't know!" She hung her head. "But somehow, I must have known it was you. I may have had my memory slate wiped clean, but I was still in

control of myself."

Link's eyes hardened, struggling to hide the feeling of betrayal that was rising in him. "You built this temple. You cast the spells."

"Yes," she said in a low voice. "I know it's too late to ask for forgiveness. But I'm so sorry."

"You're not the girl I knew," Link said, his voice untrustworthy. "If you were, it wouldn't have mattered that you couldn't remember. You wouldn't â€" "

"Link, you don't _understand!_" she cried out. "You've _always_ had your memory there, something that can back you up! I've never had it! I had even forgotten _you_! Can't you realize that I would do anything, absolutely anything to get my memory back? It was the thing I wanted most in the world!"

"Do you have your memory back?" Link asked, letting his hand drop from his sword's hilt.

She nodded.

"And are you happy because you have your memory back?"

She thought. Yes, she was ecstatic about her newfound memory. She nodded again.

Link smiled a helpless smile. "Then I guess I'm happy, too."

"Am I forgiven?" she asked, hoping the answer was yes.

"I can't forgive you what you've done," he said, shattering her hopes. He looked down. "But I canâ€|overlook it. If you're still the same person that I know you are, somewhere inside."

The Temple started to shake. She grabbed Link's arm. "Listen," she said, "Link, I don't think Father's going to â€" "

Link's eyes widened. "Father?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, Ganondorf," she said quickly, shame engulfing her. "I guess there was a reason for my eye color after all. But that's not the point. Ganondorf won't like this new, um, development, at all." She muttered something quickly under her breath and pointed at the wall behind her, which immediately opened like a door. They ran out the door and looked around. "Let's go," she said breathlessly, "let's run somewhere, anywhere where Ganondorf can't â€" "

"No!" Link interrupted. "I know he's here somewhere. I'm not going anywhere as long as he's alive."

The Temple behind them collapsed. And right in front of them was Ganondorf.

"So," Ganondorf growled. He stepped forward and glared at Link. "You've changed where my daughter's loyalties lie. You've given her memory."

"That's what you promised me!" she yelled. "You said that if I served you well, I would remember! That's the only reason I did what I did!"

"Tough luck!" Ganondorf sneered. "I needed you to delay the Hero of Time so I could build up my power â€" and you've done what I needed! Now MOVE!" he roared. She was hit by a huge jettison of black light and flew backwards, right into a rock. She was down and out. _Which is a good thing_, Ganondorf thought, _because she really does have some powers, and might join with this Hero to try to defeat me._

--

"NO!" Link cried. He whipped out the Master Sword. "You coward! Fight me!" he challenged.

"Oh, now you want a fight?" Ganondorf jeered. "You will have a fight!"

With a gesture of his hands, the ground started to rumble. A huge stone platform rose from the lava. A smaller platform rose underneath the girl, who lay still in the shadow of the rock.

Link dove forward with the Master Sword, but Ganondorf moved away. He held up a hand, and black light scattered to it. Then he let the black light loose.

Link held up his sword just at the moment the black light would have hit him, and the black light bounced back and knocked the wind out of the King of Thieves. Seizing the opportunity, Link slashed at him with his sword viciously. Every second meant more of the girl's strength draining away â€" she might even be dead already! _No_, he thought, _no!_

--

The battle was difficult, and Ganondorf killed Link once, but Link had a fairy in store which revived him back to full health.

When Ganondorf was vanquished, Link jumped to the platform where she was. He hurriedly placed his hand on her heart. She had to be alive. She had to be.

But he didn't hear her heart pumping.

"Wake up, please," he begged her. He shook her as hard as he could. "Please, you have to wake up! I forgive you for everything, just please don't be dead!" Tears started streaming down his face. "Please! I have to tell you, face to faceâ€|"

He took out the Triforce of Courage and looked at it, though it was blurred by his tears. "This helped me through the dungeons. It has to work on you." He put it right over her heart and watched, holding his breath.

She stirred!

> "Open your eyes," he begged her. <p>

She blinked. "Link," she murmured. "Where is Link? I need to see him."

Link swallowed, wiping his tears away. "I'm right here," he said gently. "Look at me."

"It is you," she said in a voice barely above a whisper. Then she saw the Triforce on her chest and laughed weakly. "Oh Link, you don't understand how the Triforce worksâ€¦it will only revive me for a few minutes, and thenâ€¦it will be beyond anyone's power toâ€¦save meâ€¦"

"Listen to me, I need you! You're not supposed to die yet. You're my age, not even twenty yetâ€¦you're too young for death!"

"I always wanted to ask you this, but I guess I'll do it now, since it's hard to be forward when you're dying, Linkâ€¦Please. Hold me?" she asked shyly.

"Anything," he said, and carefully cradled her. She looked up into his face in a sort of blissful reverie.

"Link, you know I've always loved you. You have to know that. Ever since I picked you up and brought you to my pit to heal you. You always brought such laughter into my life, and you always knew what to say and what to do," she said softly. "You made living in the pit like heaven, and you were the other half of my soul."

"Do you know, I felt the same. The exact same way." Link choked back a sob. "I never even knew your name."

"I don't have one," she said. "I was never given one. If I had known you would like me to have a name, I would have made one up on the spot." She coughed, and her entire body shuddered.

"I love you," Link said to her. He touched her hair, wound it around his finger. "I don't care if you are related to Ganondorf, because you're not like him at all."

She smiled. "I wish I couldâ€¦live. I guess it just isn't meant to be. You and me, I mean. It never in a thousand years could have worked."

"I would have made it work," Link whispered. "Can't you realize by now that I will forgive you anything? That I will do anything? For your sake?"

Her eyes closed. She breathed in, a deep breath. With her last, exhaling breath, she said, "I'll wait."

After that, not even the Triforce could help her.

The wind picked up, and carried Link's animal-like cry of grief and loneliness far, far away, to the land where memories stay forever.

--

End
file.